

**‘MORE THAN AMERICA’: SOME NEW ZEALAND RESPONSES TO
AMERICAN CULTURE IN THE MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY**

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‘I confess that in America I saw more than America....’

Alexis de Tocqueville

“America” I reject. Now we can turn to the problem of America.’

- Menno ter Braak

‘What about art?’

‘If it is art it will offend before it is revered. There are calls for its destruction and then the bidding begins.’

- E.L. Doctorow, Homer & Langley

ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on a transformational but disregarded period in New Zealand's twentieth century history, the era from the arrival of the Marines in 1942 to the arrival of *Rock Around the Clock* in 1956. It examines one of the chief agents in this metamorphosis: the impact of American culture. During this era the crucial conduits of that culture were movies, music and comics. The aims of my thesis are threefold: to explore how New Zealanders responded to this cultural trinity, determine the key features of their reactions and assess their significance.

The perceived modernity and alterity of Hollywood movies, musical genres such as swing, and the content and presentation of American comics and 'pulp', became the sources of heated debate during the midcentury. Many New Zealanders admired what they perceived as the exuberance, variety and style of such American media. They also applauded the willingness of the cultural triptych to appropriate visual, textual and musical forms and styles without respect for the traditional classifications of cultural merit. Such perceived standards were based on the privileged judgements of cultural arbiters drawn from members of New Zealand's educational and civic elites. Key figures within these elites insisted that American culture was 'low', inferior and commodified, threatening the dominance of a sacrosanct, traditional 'high' culture. Many of them also maintained that these American cultural imports endangered both the traditionally British nature of our cultural heritage, and New Zealand's distinctively 'British' identity.

Many of these complaints enfolded deeper objections to American movies, music and literary forms exemplified by comics and pulps. Significant intellectual and civic figures portrayed these cultural modes as pernicious and malignant, because they were allegedly the product of malignant African-American, Jewish and capitalist sources, which threatened to poison the cultural and social values of New Zealanders, especially the young. In order to justify such attitudes, these influential cultural guardians portrayed the general public as an essentially immature, susceptible, unthinking and puritanical mass. Accordingly, this public, supposedly ignorant of the dangers posed by American culture, required the intervention and protection of members of this elite.

Responses to these potent expressions of American culture provide focal points which both illuminate and reflect wider social, political and ideological controversies within midcentury New Zealand. Not only were these reactions part of a process of comprehension and negotiation of new aesthetic styles and media modes. They also represent an arena of public and intellectual contention whose significance has been neglected or under-valued. New Zealanders' attitudes towards the new cinematic, literary and musical elements of American culture occurred within a rich and revealing socio-political and ideological context. When we comment on that culture we reveal significant features of our own national and cultural selves.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

I



Figure 1. Lobby poster for *What's Opera, Doc?* ¹

Sometime in late 1957 several metal canisters the size of large parcels arrived in New Zealand from the United States. They contained reels of a Bugs Bunny cartoon, *What's Opera, Doc?* Gradually they made their way around the hundreds of picture theatres in New Zealand. Their journey started in the nation's four main centres and from there the reels, encased in their battered containers, travelled in the guard's vans of trains, Road Services' buses, ferries and rural delivery vans to their increasingly small and isolated destinations. As they journeyed, the cartoons suffered the various indignities that afflicted celluloid film

¹ Poster copyright Warner Bros. Inc.

stock. Striations appeared on the frame; faulty projection lenses distorted the screen image. Foreign objects – insect parts, glue, bits of dirt or grit that became affixed to the frame – increasingly smeared and distorted the projected picture of Bugs and his arch-enemy, Elmer Fudd. Occasionally the screen image erupted in a spectacular solar flare as the overheated film stock abruptly irradiated.

The containers made their way from the thousand-seat cinemas of Auckland's Queen Street to the 'picture shows' of rural towns, whose weathered exteriors sometimes still possessed hitching rails to which a sheepdog or two, even an occasional horse, might be fastened, awaiting the return of their owners from a couple of hours at the 'pictures'. The acoustics of these country theatres were such that the animals and passing pedestrians would have heard the cheers and clapping that greeted the Bugs Bunny introductory logo. Sometimes the dogs would respond with yelps and barks. On the occasion of the screening of *What's Opera, Doc?* moviegoers, dogs and passers-by alike would have heard a soundtrack dominated by selections of the music of Richard Wagner, especially his *Ring* operatic cycle. So Elmer Fudd pursued Bugs Bunny while the 'Ride of the Valkyries' scratchily rang out on the soundtrack. The stamping feet of the audience enthusiastically accompanied this unfamiliar but rousing music: 'Kill the wabbit! Kill the wabbit!' On the theatres' wooden floors a slurry of decomposing jaffas, minties and sweet wrappers, temporarily freed by the reverberations from their sticky attachment to the engrimed timbers, might momentarily lurch screenwards. In such a theatre, at such a time, that audience once included the author of this thesis.

Several decades were to pass before I recognised that *What's Opera, Doc* exemplified essential features of twentieth century American 'popular' culture. It was of course an example of mid-twentieth century Hollywood cinema and that industry's remarkable technical prowess. Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd were also popular American comic book identities, featured in the *Looney Tunes* and *Merrie Melodies* series. The Bugs Bunny cartoons not only made affectionate or ironic use of classical music such as Mendelssohn's 'Morning Song', Opus 62, No.6. They also resulted in popular hit songs written by top Broadway 'tunesmiths', melodies like 'I'm Glad That I'm Bugs Bunny'.²

This six minute cartoon effortlessly combined the three elements of what I describe as the American cultural trinity of the first six decades of the twentieth century: Hollywood

² 'Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies Capital Records Discography', <http://records.goldenagecartoons.com/wb01.html>, accessed 2 August 2010

movies, popular American musical genres such as jazz, and popular fiction in the forms of comics and pulp fiction. The enthusiastic reaction accorded *What's Opera, Doc?* by the audience of which I was a youthful member was just one sample of a range of responses to American movies, American music, and American comics. That range encompassed denunciation and adulation, acceptance and rejection. I now understand that *What's Opera, Doc?* contained those elements that many mid-century New Zealanders admired, but others deplored. It was innovative, irreverent, technologically advanced, subversive of high culture, brash and vulgar. It appropriated and spliced and diced swatches of musical and literary genres. cursory examination suggested it lacked redeeming social or moral content. And it was produced by a major American media corporation, founded by four Polish Jews with little formal education and no background in the arts. *What's Opera, Doc?* was one of thousands of American cartoons and feature films produced in factory-like conditions and exhibited with the aim of making money rather than producing great art.

II

This thesis examines responses to American culture in its three principal, pre-television manifestations in New Zealand: movies, music and comics. This triumvirate embodied the essential American cultural presence in the first six decades of twentieth century New Zealand. They were the most popular, the most reviled and the most controversial disseminators of American culture in New Zealand during that era. Discourses of the time frequently conflated the three into one large cultural conglomerate, and for good reasons. Hollywood musicals, popular here for decades with both males and females, young and old, were a vital conduit for the transmission of American musical genres and dance styles. American comic book characters became the subjects of songs, movie cartoons, serials and feature films. The recurring complaints and praise about American culture – its vulgarity, commercialism, crassness, innovation and technical expertise – all drew their examples from this aural, visual and literary triptych.

My aim in researching and writing this thesis is to investigate an aspect of twentieth century New Zealand history whose significance has been overlooked. It is based on the conviction that the study of 'popular' culture provides the historian with added dimensions and perspectives that can reveal otherwise neglected or forgotten features of a nation's history. The responses American culture evoked from New Zealanders provide an infrequently examined arena of contestation in which were deployed many of the

intellectual, cultural, social and political rivalries that characterised mid-twentieth century New Zealand. My intention is to assess the nature and significance of New Zealanders' receptions of these pre-computer routers of twentieth century American culture. This will enable an enhanced understanding of an era of New Zealand's cultural history that most accounts relegate to the status of a historiographical backwater.³

By investigating a comprehensive range of archival evidence of responses to these three cultural influences, I intend to demonstrate that both the topic and the era constitute vital markers in the history of New Zealand in the twentieth century. Examining responses to all three modes provides the opportunity to compare and contrast the various reactions to each medium, and to ascertain if a pattern of similar tropes and themes emerge.

Accordingly, this thesis scrutinises several key issues relating to New Zealanders' responses to American culture, focusing on during the midcentury period from the 1940s to the mid-1950s. One such question involves the crucial conundrum that Roger Horrocks observed in anti-American attitudes in postwar New Zealand. He asked why 'the anti-Americanism that is an obvious feature of New Zealand culture' was so persistent, given the popularity of American culture with the New Zealand public.⁴ Denis Lacorne and Tony Judt described anti-Americanism as 'the banal but decidedly widespread discourse of our age – the rhetorical form through which most of the world organizes its understanding of the age we live in'.⁵ As cultural issues have always constituted a vital source of anti-Americanism, I argue that a study of this rhetoric in mid-twentieth century New Zealand contributes to a wider understanding of this master narrative of the last three-quarters of a century.

This thesis also attempts to discover the fundamental themes that buttressed the discourses expressing New Zealanders' responses to American culture. It inquires if these tropes had already become embedded in New Zealand attitudes before the arrival of US military forces in 1942. These reactions are examined not only in a trans-Tasman context but also within a wider global framework, utilising contemporary perspectives in Canada, western Europe and Britain. My thesis seeks to answer the question of whether or not local responses provide evidence of New Zealand exceptionalism, contrary to Miles Fairburn's

³ Antje Bednarek observes the 'noticeable lack of historical research' and 'superficial treatment' of the 1950s. Bednarek, 'Put on the Margins: The Mainstream Culture and the Alienated Writer in the 1950s' (M.S.S. thesis, Lincoln University, 2006), p.7; 19

⁴ Roger Horrocks, 'Hollywood', in Malcolm McKinnon, ed, *The American Connection: Essays From the Stout Centre Conference* (Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1988), p.69

⁵ Denis Lacorne and Tony Judt, 'Introduction: the Banality of Anti-Americanism', D. Lacorne and T. Judt, eds, *With Us Or Against Us: Studies in Global Anti-Americanism* (Gordonville, VA, USA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p.8 < site.elibrary.com/lib/uofcanterbury1/Doc?id=10135651&ppg=14 > accessed 20 October 2010.

eloquent rebuttal of that concept,⁶ or proof of transnational commonalities embodied within reactions to globalising cultural forces. A study of these responses also provides the advantage of offering fresh insights into the changing nature of New Zealand's relationship with Britain during the mid-century.

Another issue that I examine concerns the reception of American culture by New Zealand's civic, cultural and intellectual arbiters, and what this reveals about elites' underlying ideological and political motivations. In turn, this enables a study of their attitudes towards, and perceptions of, the wider New Zealand public from which were drawn the various audiences for American cultural forms.

In order to facilitate these inquiries, the thesis has been organised as follows. The remainder of this chapter defines and discusses 'culture', that emotionally and ideologically contentious term. It explains why I have located American movies, music and comics within the descriptor 'culture' rather than assign them the categories of 'popular' or 'mass' culture. The next chapter examines the various interpretations New Zealand historians have derived from the brief history of the impact of American cultural influences on the nation. This is juxtaposed by a survey of the key tropes in the centuries-old historiography of European responses to those same influences. Chapters three through eight investigate how New Zealanders reacted to music, comics and movies, those crucial conduits of American culture. Although my primary focus is on the midcentury years, I also explore the extent to which key elements of these responses were already entrenched here before the 1940s. Chapter nine examines the ways in which some editorial cartoonists of the immediate postwar era appropriated and referenced American movies, comics and music in order to comment on both American and New Zealand politics, society and culture. Chapter ten concludes the thesis by showing how New Zealanders' responses to the American cultural trinity provide an enhanced understanding of New Zealand's cultural, social and political history in the mid-twentieth century.

⁶ Miles Fairburn, 'Is There a Good Case for New Zealand Exceptionalism?' in Tony Ballantyne and Brian Montgomery, eds, *Disputed Histories: Imagining New Zealand's Pasts* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2006), pp.143-167

III

I originally intended this investigation to be contained within the time-span of the 1940s through to the 1960s. It soon became apparent that the sixties era alone contained sufficient material to justify a doctoral thesis. I also realized the truth of Michael Dawson and Catherine Gidney's advice that 'beginning and end points in history are complex and contingent entities and should not be assigned casually' and that investigative time frames should be subtle and elastic.⁷ Furthermore, as Stuart Murray observes, 'any invocation of a period of culture is provisional'.⁸ However, recent revisionist studies of post-1945 era Canadian, British, and western European history emphasised the significance of the period from 1943 to 1956 as forming a distinct and viable period of historical analysis.⁹

My research led me to conclude that 1956 was a valid terminus, because it marked a series of important socio-cultural events. In that year Elvis Presley first appeared on New Zealand radio, his records became available here and *Rock Around the Clock*, the first rock 'n' roll movie, was screened. The spasm of controversy that accompanied the issue of 'comics' and juvenile delinquency for a few weeks in 1954 had dissipated. After 1956 the dominant issue involving American cultural influences in New Zealand no longer concerned comics or movies or music. Instead, debate now focused on the implications of the approaching introduction of television broadcasting into New Zealand. The year 1956 also marked two crucial international events. The USSR's suppression of the Hungarian revolt meant that New Zealand's radical left now had to confront an issue involving the evils of Russian, rather than American, imperialism. The Suez Canal crisis highlighted the collapse of British imperial pretensions and its implications for New Zealand's relationships with the United Kingdom.¹⁰

Deciding on a starting point was more difficult. The year 1942 appeared to be an obvious marker. In that year American military forces first arrived in the North Island, bringing their cultural preferences with them. Their arrival, I initially believed, acted as a

⁷ Michael Dawson and Catherine Gidney, 'Persistence and Inheritance: Rethinking Periodisation and English Canada's 'Twentieth Century' in Christopher Dummitt and Michael Dawson, eds, *Contesting Clio's Craft: New Directions and Debates in Canadian History* (London: University of London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2009), p.55

⁸ Stuart Murray, *Never a Soul at Home: New Zealand Literary Nationalism and the 1930s* (Wellington: Victoria University of Wellington Press, 1998), p11

⁹ Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, 'Recasting Canada's Post-War Decade' in *Cultures of Citizenship in Post-War Canada, 1940-1955*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), pp.4-6

¹⁰ e.g. see David Capie, 'New Zealand and the World: Imperial, International and Global Relations' in Giselle Byrnes, ed, *The New Oxford History of New Zealand* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.587-8

catalyst, abruptly precipitating a series of reactions to that culture. A study of evidence revealed that this American ‘invasion’ was essentially a vivid manifestation of a pre-existing state of affairs. The cultural artifacts of this infiltration did not need to establish a beachhead in 1942. They had been stationed and active within New Zealand for years. Post-1942 responses to their presence were part of an evolving continuum of receptivity. Although 1942-4 remains the key point of departure for my investigations, I realised that a better understanding of the post-1942 reactions was achieved by locating them within a longer historical arc, one that occasionally reached back to World War I. This configuration threw the contours of my research into a sharper and more revealing relief. It also enabled me to investigate more accurately whether the responses of the forties and fifties represented a decisive change in cultural outlook or marked the persistence of cultural attitudes over several decades.

IV

My methodology is based on extensive archival research. Many investigations of twentieth century New Zealand reactions to American culture have been driven by deterministic assumptions about cultural imperialism, mass culture and moral panics. The search for evidence has frequently been confined to culling data that apparently confirmed the ideological and political claims underlying these suppositions. Evidence has been presumed and assumed rather than assessed and evaluated. The recent controversy over Peter Jackson’s *Hobbit* movie project has produced assertions about uncouth Hollywood moguls, greedy New York financiers, and the gullibility of the New Zealand public that reveal an atavistic reprocessing of tropes prevalent over half a century ago.

Research into the reception of American movies, music and comics in New Zealand has usually been limited to a small and privileged range of evidence.¹¹ Most of it has been confined to ‘official’ or ‘elitist’ sources: government departmental officials, pronouncements

¹¹ The key exceptions to this include Nerida J. Elliott, ‘Anzac, Hollywood and Home: Cinema and Film-Going in Auckland, 1909-1939’ (M.A. thesis, University of Auckland, 1989); Simon Sigley, ‘Film Culture: Its Development in New Zealand, 1929 – 1972’, (University of Auckland, Ph.D thesis, 2003), Prof. Barbara Brookes’ ‘Which Barrier Was Broken? *Broken Barrier* and the New Zealand Cinema in the 1950s’ in *New Zealand Journal of History*, Vol.44 No.2, 2010, pp.121-133 and Charlotte Greenhalgh’s ‘Bush Cinderellas: Young New Zealanders and Romance at the Movies, 1919-1939’, *New Zealand Journal of History*, Vol.44, No.1 (2010), pp.1-21. Chris Bourke’s admirable *Blue Smoke: the Lost Dawn of New Zealand Popular Music 1918-1964* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2010) incorporates an extensive range of ‘unofficial’ resources relating to popular music.

by civic elites, parliamentary speeches, newspaper editorials, articles by members of the cultural and intellectual elites. This is not to deny that much of this evidence proved invaluable. Memos and correspondence from the cabinet ministers and departmental files illuminated 'official' attitudes to the impact of American culture. However, until very recently there has been little academic interest in examining evidence from a much wider spectrum of the New Zealand public, most of whom were not ministers of state, ministerial advisers, civic dignitaries or cultural arbiters. Accordingly, I attempted to find sources beyond the confines of the documents and attitudes of the administratively, educationally and politically privileged. The unheard voices of other New Zealanders, expressed for example in the cinema notebooks of a Wellington office-worker, the social notes of the small Southland community of Otautau, the arguments of teachers at conferences, the opinions of young women about swing and rock /n' roll, were all invaluable. They provided fresh attitudes and insights to supplement and frequently contradict those of the cultural arbiters and public intellectuals of the age.

While newspaper and journal editorials were revealing, so were the overlooked correspondence and debates that such discourses stimulated among the public at large. So-called popular newspapers and periodicals, such as *NZ Magazine* and *Truth* provided insights into cultural attitudes not found in the more frequently cited journals of intellectual opinion such as *Here & Now*, *Landfall* and the *Listener* of the 1940s and early 1950s. Short-lived literary journals like *Arena*. Newspapers and journals of the right, such as the *National Review* as well as those of the left, like the *People's Voice*, supplied trenchant critiques of American culture.

Close readings of two other neglected sources provided me with new perspectives. Examination of newspaper and journal editorial cartoons appropriating aspects of American culture enabled me to appreciate the irony and subtlety that underlay these New Zealand artists-commentators' reception of American culture. Some of the most vivid evidence of the impact of U.S. films, comics and music can be found within another neglected source, the novels, poems, short stories and reminiscences of New Zealand authors. The fiction of R.H. Morrieson, for example, conveys an almost visceral sense of the way in which American music, movies and pulp fiction affected New Zealand sensibilities in the immediate postwar era. Adopting this panoramic approach that incorporated evidence other than that of official or intellectual elites enabled a better appreciation of the diversity and range of New Zealand responses to American culture.

My methodology was influenced by the work of several historians. E.P. Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class* declared that ‘I am seeking to rescue the poor stockinger, the Luddite cropper, the obsolete Handloom weaver, the “utopian” artisan ... from the enormous condescension of posterity’.¹² Thompson was critical of those academic approaches that treated the working class as a homogeneous and passive bloc, victims of economic and socio-cultural forces beyond their understanding and control. The evidence he produced to support his conclusion that they were not hapless and undifferentiated victims, but possessed agency and asserted control, encouraged me to investigate the extent to which this argument applied to the wider New Zealand public in their responses of American culture. Accordingly, I set out to investigate the evidence of the widest possible range of New Zealanders, regardless of their assumed socio-economic and cultural status.

My approach was also influenced by the insights of Pierre Bourdieu and Stuart Hall into the ways in which social class and educational capital affect aesthetic tastes and cultural values. Bourdieu argued cultural capital was just as important as economic capital in class formations. Elites’ assertions of cultural distinction rested on their claims to recognize ‘legitimate’ or ‘high’ culture. This requires what Bourdieu calls the ‘pure gaze’ or the ‘aesthetic disposition’, characterised by its rejection of popular taste. This disposition deplores the perceived frivolous, evanescent, and superficial pleasures offered by ‘popular’ culture. ‘Legitimate’ culture, as discerned by the pure gaze, is intellectually stimulating, complex and demanding, requiring a much more considered approach. For Bourdieu, intellectuals play a key role in the formation of these cultural constructs. They both define and patrol the cultural boundaries they have established, determined to protect their legitimated cultural forms.¹³ Like Bourdieu, Stuart Hall’s seminal essay on the nature of the ‘popular’ similarly emphasised the role academics and intellectuals play in the cultural arena. Hall insists that culture is the site of constant struggle, where elites attempt to enforce their cultural and social values on resisting subdominant groups by categorising and defining all cultural forms. He argues convincingly that texts are not intrinsically popular or elite, nor wholly authentic or corrupt. As historical contexts change, what was once dismissed by elites as inferior eventually becomes accepted, even valued, by new sets of cultural arbiters.¹⁴

Other approaches were equally valuable. James Ceaser’s *Reconstructing America* enabled me to better understand how New Zealanders’ responses to American culture

¹² E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books, 1980), p.12

¹³ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* trans. Richard Nice, (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), esp. Pt.III

¹⁴ Stuart Hall, ‘Notes on Deconstructing “The Popular”’, in Raphael Samuel, ed, *People’s History and Socialist Theory*, (London: Routledge, 1981) esp. pp. 231-235

consistently employed synecdoche, especially ‘Hollywood’, ‘jazz’ and ‘comics’, in order to construct a symbolic and imagined America.¹⁵ Alex Ross’s magisterial *The Rest is Noise* showed me how American music and the responses it elicited were crucial indicators of twentieth century cultural, social and political mores.¹⁶ Ross’s work, along with that of Ceaser and Philippe Roger’s *The American Enemy*¹⁷ demonstrated the necessity of locating New Zealand’s mid-century responses to Disney, Presley and Superman as part of a process of progression, the understanding of which required an investigation of antecedents. My readings of Hall and Rogers in particular also encouraged me to look askance at the claims of New Zealanders such as W.J. Scott and Gordon Mirams who based their objections to American culture on the grounds that they were acting as the nation’s moral and cultural guardians. Their constant assertions that the New Zealand public required protection from the pernicious consequences of an irredeemably vulgar and malignant American culture could now be seen in the light of a wider twentieth century historical process in which elites from both left and right denounced that culture and denigrated the abilities and intelligence of the wider public in order to justify and extend their own social, cultural and political authority. As Bourdieu has shown, cultural preferences are crucial articulations of political and social statements and ideologies. Culture, after all, is politics by other means.

V

I have chosen to enfold American movies, music and comics and pulp literature within the broader term ‘culture’ rather than enlist them within the more regimented descriptors of ‘popular’ or ‘mass’ culture, those alleged antonyms of ‘high’ or ‘serious’ culture. My approach rejects such a distortive cultural bifurcation. Instead, it regards the various cultural forms and genres as porous membranes, constantly interchanging attitudes and content in a form of aesthetic osmosis. I agree with Rob Kroes’ succinct definition of American culture as ‘a configuration of the ways and means that Americans use for expressing their collective sense of themselves’.¹⁸ However, throughout this thesis I have

¹⁵ James Ceaser, *Reconstructing America: the Symbol of America in Modern Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997)

¹⁶ Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (London: Harper Perennial, 2009)

¹⁷ Philippe Roger, *The American Enemy: a Story of French Anti-Americanism*, trans. Sharon Bowman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005)

¹⁸ Rob Kroes, ‘American Empire and Cultural Imperialism: a View From the Receiving End’, p.3, Paper presented to the Conference to the German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C., March 25-27, 1999 on *The American Impact on Western Europe: Americanization and Westernization in Transatlantic Perspective*.

utilised a more specific, but inclusive explication of the term ‘culture’. I define the term as meaning the representational and communicative strategies, including language, visual and aural texts and art, that are created, employed and transmitted by social groups.¹⁹ This definition recognizes Michael Kammen’s observation that the history of cultural taste levels in the twentieth century has been one of ‘fluidity, blending, and the attendant blurring of boundaries’.²⁰ Strictly defined cultural strata have gradually become irrelevant and meaningless. Once powerful cultural authorities and arbiters have seen their influence and status decline. Susan Sontag’s seminal 1964 essay ‘On Culture and the New Sensibility’ rejected Matthew Arnold’s distinction between high and low cultures and his insistence that edification must be a necessary role of culture. It also insisted that the new cultural sensibility was pluralistic, inclusive of fun, irony and nostalgia as well as solemnity and tradition.²¹

This issue over the demarcation between ‘high’ and ‘low’ or popular culture is crucial to any consideration of responses to American culture. As Jock Phillips noted, an essential factor in elitist reactions to American cultural artifacts in post-1945 New Zealand involves constructing them as ‘low’ culture, in contrast to their British equivalents, which carry the patina of ‘high’ culture, untarnished by commercialism or vulgarity.²² Such a perspective has a long antecedent. Almost a century earlier Arnold fretted about the transatlantic implications of a democratic and diversified American culture. ‘In things of the mind, and in culture and totality’, Arnold proclaimed, ‘America, instead of surpassing us all, falls short’.²³ He asked ‘...what influence may help us to prevent the English people from becoming, with the growth of democracy, Americanised?’²⁴ Many New Zealand intellectuals of the twentieth century asked this of their own country. They shared Arnold’s apprehensions about the socio-cultural implications of mass democracy. He maintained that the new British urban working-class and their culture threatened social and political anarchy.

¹⁹ This definition utilises the key concepts and terminology of Musya Grants & Pamela Kachurin, ‘General Introduction: Culture, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War’, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol.4, No.1, Winter 2002, pp.3-5, especially footnote 1, p.3. Their work utilises the ideas of Marcel Danesi, *Analysing Cultures: an Introduction and Handbook* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999)

²⁰ Michael Kammen, *American Culture American Tastes: Social Change and the Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1999), pp.xiv-xvi; citation from p.xvi.

²¹ ‘On Culture and the New Sensibility’, in Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1967), pp.303-4

²² Jock Phillips, ‘The Influence of American Culture on New Zealand Since the Second World War’, in Ann Trotter, ed, *New Zealand, Canada and the United States: the Papers of the Twenty-second Foreign Policy School, 1987* (Dunedin: University Extension, 1987), pp.37-40

²³ Matthew Arnold, Preface to ‘Culture and Anarchy’, in ‘*Culture and Anarchy*’ and *Other Writings*, ed. Stefan Collini, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.199

²⁴ Matthew Arnold, ‘Democracy’, in ‘*Culture and Anarchy*’ and *Other Writings*, pp. 12-13. Emphasis in original.

The middle classes of Britain, unless properly trained in their cultural duties, would not only 'Americanise' Britain. They would 'rule it by their energy, but they will deteriorate it by their low ideals and want of culture'.²⁵

VI

Many New Zealand midcentury critics of American culture echoed these concerns. Like Arnold, they claimed that a 'civilised' middle-class imbued with cultural authority should exercise a hegemonic aesthetic influence within society. They were indebted to his famous pronouncement that culture 'does not try to teach down to the level of the inferior masses; it does not try to win them for this or that sect of its own... It seeks ...to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere....'²⁶ Like Arnold, these critics maintained that the 'raw and uncultivated masses' could be tamed through 'sweetness and light'. They insisted that the wider public required the supervision of their cultural and educational superiors. The qualities of emotional instability and intellectual fecklessness they claimed characterised the New Zealand public were the very attributes ascribed to women by those who had opposed female suffrage. The spokespeople for these elites accepted that the overwhelming majority of citizens had become members of the political electorate. But that public's fondness for American culture damned them in the eyes of many of the civic, educational and cultural elites of the interwar and middle decades. It provided them with 'evidence' that most New Zealanders lacked the aesthetic qualifications required to appropriately exercise their cultural franchise.

Towards the end of the nineteenth, and for most of the first half of the twentieth centuries, Arnold's fears about popular culture and mass society were developed by European cultural critics such as Nietzsche and Ortega y Gasset. Like Arnold, they deplored what they considered to be the low cultural and political standards of the industrialised masses and the consequent destabilising consequences for society. New Zealand's most influential mid-century cultural mentor, Charles Brasch, shared Arnold's belief that cultural values were constant, not relative and that the arts were an instrument of social

²⁵ Matthew Arnold, 'Democracy', in *'Culture and Anarchy' and Other Writings*, pp.21-22

²⁶ Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed, Samuel Lipman, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p.56. Philippe Roger has shown how twentieth century French intellectuals feared that America lacked an elite capable of guiding and monitoring the vulgar cultural appetites of the masses. Roger, *American Enemy*, pp.426-7

transformation.²⁷ Brasch, W.H. Oliver notes, ‘made it his business to resist the erosive effects of New Zealand philistinism upon the higher values of artistic and intellectual culture’.²⁸ For two decades Brasch made *Landfall* an Arnoldian ‘bastion of high culture’ in postwar New Zealand.²⁹

In New Zealand the most influential recent exemplars of this school of thought were F.R. Leavis and his *Scrutiny* group. In the significantly titled *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* (1930), Leavis condemned American-led processes of modernisation, technology and industrialisation as endangering ‘high’ culture and the authority of its traditional elite guardians. The Leavisites clung to a romanticised view, praising the pastoral or folk culture of the ‘organic’ rural communities, which they associated with pre-industrial Britain. Like Arnold, they insisted that adherence to aesthetic standards mandated by the cultural elite was an intrinsic part of ‘good’ culture. During 1937-8 the first Labour government emulated this latter stance with its plans to wean New Zealanders off their coarse diet of American movies and replace it by the more refined regime of continental and British cinema.

Many members of New Zealand elites also endorsed the cultural ideology of the Frankfurt school of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno. The pair’s studies of American popular culture in the late 1930s and 1940s, using a Marxist perspective, led them to argue that American mass media and culture, which they described as ‘the culture industry’, were the subtle but coercive means by which the ruling class imposed their political, social and cultural values on the masses. In effect, the Frankfurt scholars turned Arnold’s cultural critique on its head while incorporating its elitist and paternalistic ethos. So-called ‘popular’ or ‘mass’ culture in its Americanised version, far from destabilising socio-political authority, maintained and reinforced that supremacy. It also attenuated the will of the exploited masses to overthrow monopoly capitalism, the nexus of that authority. The culture industry was narcotising and stultifying the working classes of the U.S.A. and other capitalist economies by a process of cultural addiction, which replaced revolutionary

²⁷ See John Geraets, ‘Charles Brasch’s *Landfall*: a Second Life”, in Kerr, Donald, ed, *Enduring Legacy: Charles Brasch, Patron, Poet & Collector* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2003), pp.127-142; John W. Geraets, ‘Landfall under Brasch: The Humanizing Journey’ (Ph.D. thesis, University of Auckland, 1982); Eleanor Ross, Eleanor, ‘Charles Brasch, Matthew Arnold, and New Zealand Literary Culture: an Exploration of the Nature and Impact of Charles Brasch’s Tastes and Values (M.A. thesis, University of Otago, 2004)

²⁸ W.H. Oliver, ‘Charles Brasch in his times’, in Kerr, *Enduring Legacy*, p.120

²⁹ The description is by Patrick Evans, cited in Olivia Eaton and Jacob Edmond, ‘Russia in *Landfall* Under Charles Brasch’, *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, Vol. 42 ((2007), p. 188. For a thorough discussion of the influence of Arnold on Brasch, see Geraets, ‘*Landfall* Under Brasch’, *passim*

energies with complacent compliance with the status quo.³⁰ Their viewpoint paralleled some of the ideas of Antonio Gramsci. He subtly refined Marxist orthodoxy about how the oppressing classes repressed the masses in capitalist systems. Gramsci suggested that this exercise of oppressive power could be achieved through ‘hegemony’ rather than force, by persuading oppressed groups to accept, even admire, the ideological, social and cultural values of their oppressors. Thus revolutionary consciousness was diluted and diverted; instead of the masses acquiring a revolutionary mentality, they gained a false consciousness.

These Marxist theories of advanced stages of capitalism, combined with Gramscian schema of hegemony and Leavisite fears about the threat posed to ‘proper’ culture by Americanised mass media, frequently found expression in discourses about cultural imperialism. For decades from the 1930s, academic discussion in New Zealand on the foreign reception of American culture focused around this hypothesis. American movies, movies and comics were the stalking-horses of American capitalism. This commodified culture dominated and colonised local, so-called ‘authentic’, cultures.³¹ During the 1960s’ counter-culture era this view was re-focused to highlight the role of American mass media. Thus Herbert Schiller, whose ideas were influential in New Zealand, maintained that the transmission abroad of American popular culture was part of an attempt by the ‘American military-industrial complex’ to Americanise world culture and to subject nations to American control.³²

This argument has come under increasing attack during the last four decades. The crucial front in this battle is the controversy over how foreign audiences and consumers actually respond to American popular culture. Instead of an emphasis on imposition and supine acceptance, there has been a focus on the powers of creative negotiation, adaptation and appropriation displayed by the recipient society. This fresh perspective, advocated by some cultural historians such as Mel van Elteren and Rob Kroes, portrayed American culture as offering diversity and new forms of communal participation. These scholars criticised the cultural imperialist school for being patronising and elitist in their insistence that national audiences are essentially passive and unresisting dupes, stupefied by the overwhelming

³⁰ See Tony Bennett, *Popular Culture: Themes and Issues Block One Part Three* (Milton Keynes: Open University, 1981), pp.20-22

³¹ Robert Rydell, ‘The Americanization of the World and the Spectacle of the American Exhibits at the 1900 Paris Universal Exposition’ in T. Alves et al, eds, *Ceremonies and Spectacles: Performing American Culture* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2000), p.99 cited in Kroes, Rob, ‘American Studies in Europe or: Brother, Can You Spare a Paradigm?’, *Transatlantica* [En Ligne], 1/2001, mis en ligne le 23 mars 2006. <URL:<http://transatlantica.revues.org/327>> accessed 1 July, 2010

³² Herbert Schiller, *Mass Communications and American Empire* (New York: Kelley, 1969)

forces of a hegemonic American popular culture. They especially condemned that approach for its failure to recognise that these audiences borrow selectively from the cultural repertoire on offer and appropriate the borrowings creatively, 'assigning their own meanings to products and practices'.³³

VII

By 1945 New Zealanders and their wartime allies were participants in another struggle. This involved the massive national economic and social dislocations and changes that resulted from the war efforts. Military service had removed many male adults from their families. Many females, including mothers, had been encouraged or even compelled to join the work force. Some of the rural population, including Maori, moved to the cities to take advantage of the wartime industrial job market there. Consequently, many children and youths were less liable to adult or community supervision than before the war. Juvenile crime rates rose. The return of overseas military personnel after the war and the readjustment to a turbulent peacetime economy characterised by inflation, prolonged labour unrest and overseas monetary exchange crises, produced further social and economic tensions. These were exacerbated by apprehensions arising from the Cold War and the existence of rival nuclear arsenals. This pervasive and fundamental sense of unease not only meant that youth and their protection became the focus of concern.³⁴ As George Gerbner observed,

The corruption of children and youth has ...been the target of choice of all great cultural debates, from Socrates to media violence. However, concern with children is, in many ways, more a decoy than the real object of concern.... The real contest is over the distribution of culture-power.³⁵

Accordingly, New Zealanders opposed to American culture presented children and adolescents as threatened by the 'pernicious' American triumvirate of movies, music, and

³³ Mel van Elteren, 'Rethinking Americanization Abroad: Towards a Critical Alternative to Prevailing Paradigms', *Journal of American Culture*, Vol.29 No.3 (September, 2006), pp.345-368; van Elteren, 'Americanism and Americanisation', p.181. Phillip Schlesinger argues that dominant ideology arguments are flawed by a 'fallacy of distribution'. Their dialectic presupposes that 'distributing the same cultural product leads to an identity of interpretation on the part of those who consume it'. Phillip Schlesinger, 'Wishful Thinking: Cultural Politics, Medias and Collective Identities in Europe', *Journal of Communications*, Vol. 43 No. 2 (1993), pp.2-13, cited van Elteren, 'Americanism and Americanisation', p.182

³⁴ For a valuable discussion of this feature in postwar Canada, see Mary L. Adams, 'Youth, Corruptibility, and English-Canadian Postwar Campaigns Against Indecency, 1948-1955' in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol.6 No.1 (July 1995), pp.89 – 117

³⁵ George Gerbner, 'Foreword', Garth Jowett et al, eds, *Children and the Movies: Media Influence and the Payne Fund Controversy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, digital version), p.x

comics and pulps. Members of civic and intellectual elites frequently cited this ostensible concern as justification for their policies of cultural censorship and interdiction that aimed at regulating or proscribing those forms of culture that they deemed to be potentially salacious and insufficiently edifying. They also subtly extended the boundaries of regimens of regulation and restriction to incorporate the wider public, as well as youth.³⁶

At the same time the reverberations of the war exposed new fault lines in New Zealand's social landscape. New Zealand's strategic policies were undergoing a fundamental re-alignment. This shift from reliance on a British to an American mentor has received exemplary attention from New Zealand historians.³⁷ By comparison, the concurrent re-adjustment of New Zealand's cultural loyalties from Britain to America, and the implications, social and political as well as aesthetic, of this crucial development have been neglected. As Malcolm McKinnon observed of American-New Zealand relations in the 1980s, the larger and more powerful nation impacted its smaller and weaker partner in the cultural sphere as well as the economic, political and military spheres.³⁸

Concerns about the popularity and influence of American culture were linked to fears that New Zealand's traditional strategic, military, imperial and cultural loyalties to the United Kingdom were being eroded. For many this was a disturbing and dangerous trend. As Gerald Hensley noted, pre-1939 New Zealand 'liked the Empire'. Not only had it provided a panorama vaster than the Pacific. It had also offered apparent economic security based on the Royal Navy's command of the trade routes to Britain. The British empire also 'supplied standards in fashion, learning, the arts and behaviour to a land which would have been raw without them'.³⁹ Yet even before Pearl Harbor there been a fundamental alteration in New Zealand's stance. Early in 1941 a Foreign Office official observed what he described as the dominion's 'increasing tendency to worship the U.S.A., particularly the U.S. conception of democracy'.⁴⁰

The fall of Singapore and the establishment of American garrisons in New Zealand made manifest the fundamental change in the Dominion's strategic stance. Some abhorred

³⁶ See Adams, 'Youth, Corruptibility....', esp. p.116 on this aspect.

³⁷ E.g. Gerald Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield: New Zealand and its Allies 1939-45* (North Shore: Viking, 2009); W. David McIntyre, 'From Dual Dependency to Nuclear Free' in Geoffrey Rice, ed, *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, 2nd ed, (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1992), Ch.20; McIntyre, *Background to the ANZUS Pact: Policy-Making, Strategy and Diplomacy, 1945-55* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 1995); Macintyre, *When, If Ever, Did New Zealand Become Independent?* (Christchurch: Canterbury History Foundation, 2002).

³⁸ Malcolm McKinnon, ed, 'Introduction', *The American Connection: Essays From the Stout Centre Conference* (Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1988), p.1

³⁹ Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield*, pp.52-3

⁴⁰ Hensley, *Beyond the Battlefield*, p.150

this profound transformation. They also deplored what they perceived as changing attitudes to Britain and the empire.⁴¹ C.K. Stead observed that for youngsters like him in 1942,

Britain was our history, our 'serious' side, and our mana – all of which we simultaneously saluted, embraced, resented and even, almost, despised.... Our shield and promise of safety, the Royal Navy, had proved a pompous fraud. The Americans came as rescuers, and as the deliverers of silk stockings and chocolates, jitterbug and jazz. These were gifts, and a rescue, which would have consequences throughout the succeeding decades of NZ's history....⁴²

For decades Britain had been New Zealand's cultural as well as its strategic mentor. The strategic shift, with Uncle Sam replacing John Bull as New Zealand's protector had been increasingly obvious since 1942. The cultural turn, with New York and Los Angeles joining London and Sydney as New Zealand's key cultural metropolises, had been underway for most of the twentieth century. By the mid-century the intensity of the responses to that change had become almost palpable as its significance rapidly unfolded. It is this transformation, and the emotions and attitudes it evoked, that provide the subject of this thesis.

⁴¹ The examiner for the 1943 History Matriculation exam alleged that some scripts 'contained references to Britain and top British policies that were in deplorable taste'. Milner blamed teachers, universities and 'leftists' for this state of affairs. 'Hands off the Flag!', *New Zealand Observer*, 16 August, 1944, p.6

⁴² C.K. Stead, *South-West of Eden: a Memoir* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2010), p.16

CHAPTER TWO

NEW ZEALAND'S 'AMERICA' AND SYMBOLIC 'AMERICA'

Part One

I

Until recently, historians have paid perfunctory attention to the immediate postwar decade in New Zealand. The era has existed in a historiographic limbo, regarded as an insignificant parenthesis of a decade, inserted between the momentous narrative of the eras of depression and world war, and the excitements of the sixties.¹ The mid-century's cultural and political histories have long been regarded as uneventful and uninspiring, enlivened only by the occasional outburst of excitement, such as the waterfront dispute and concerns over issues such as 'milk bar cowboys'. Historians' interest in that period focused on two aspects. The first was the strategic and military implications of America's emergence as the dominant power in the Pacific region and that nation's replacement of the United Kingdom as New Zealand's chief defensive guardian. The second feature was what Giselle Brynes and Chris Hilliard regard as the twin obsessions of most postwar New Zealand general histories, best exemplified by the works of Keith Sinclair and W.H. Oliver. These discourses feature colony-to-nation metanarratives in which a search for a chimerical national identity constitutes their crucial motif.²

Throughout the twentieth century few New Zealand historians examined the impact of American cultural forces on New Zealand life or investigated the parallels between the histories of the two countries. During the 1980s Jock Phillips succinctly examined post-1945 American cultural influences. Geoff Lealand, Roger Horrocks, Roger Openshaw and Roy Shuker studied the impact of American mass media on New Zealand life. However, that quartet viewed local responses through two constricted ideological frames: moral panic and cultural imperialism. Their treatment of both these perspectives relied on a limited range and depth of evidence, and largely portrayed in an unflattering light New Zealanders' reactions to American culture.

¹ See Antje Bendarek's discussion of this feature as it applies to the 1950s in Bendarek's, 'Out on the Margins? The Mainstream Culture and the Alienated Writer in the Fifties' (M.S.S. thesis, Lincoln University, 2006), pp.1-11

² E.g. see Giselle Brynes, 'Introduction', Ch.1 in *The New Oxford History of New Zealand* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) and Hilliard's 'Colonial Culture and the Province of Cultural History' in *New Zealand Journal of History*, Vol. 36, No.1 (April 2002), pp.82-97

Another aspect of American social and cultural influence, the effects of the arrival of American troops in the North Island in the early 1940s, that abrupt physical manifestation of American power and pre-eminence in the Pacific, received less ideological attention from Phillips, Deborah Montgomerie and others. Their work aimed instead at investigating the various interactions - fraternal, recreational, romantic, sexual and economic - between New Zealanders and the 'Yanks' during their brief encampment here.³ These studies, perceptive and humane, provided sympathetic and often moving insights into cultural and social exchanges between the two different lifestyles during wartime. Yet investigations of New Zealanders' reactions to American culture during this era remain infrequent, despite James Belich's brief but invigorating discussions of American material and popular culture in *Paradise Reforged* and the insistence by Philippa Mein Smith, Peter Hempenstall and others of the importance of considering New Zealand history, cultural and otherwise, within a transnational setting.⁴ Giselle Byrnes reiterated the significance of this feature. In *The New Oxford History* she called for a recognition that New Zealand history was part of a 'much larger canvas', incorporating a range of influences from beyond these islands.⁵

II

One historian who, decades earlier, did consider New Zealand history to be part of a much wider intellectual, social and cultural spectrum was J.C. Beaglehole. From the mid-1930s to the mid 1950s, Beaglehole, the most eminent twentieth century authority on James Cook and his voyages, made an insightful but now overlooked contribution to New Zealand's cultural history. He argued that there were significant cultural consanguinities between the United States and New Zealand.⁶ This interpretation derived from his fascination with how 'an inherited tradition changed over time'⁷ – a process that he believed was shared by the New England colonies and New Zealand. As early as 1936 Beaglehole

³ e.g. Deborah Montgomerie, *The Women's War: New Zealand Women 1939-45* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2001); Jock Phillips with Ellen Ellis, *Brief Encounter: American Forces and the New Zealand People, 1942-1945* (Wellington: Historical Branch, Dept of Internal Affairs, 1992)

⁴ E.g. Philippa Mein Smith, Peter Hempenstall and Shaun Goldfinch, *Remaking the Tasman World*, (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2009), esp. Ch.1; Mein Smith, 'The Tasman World', Ch.13 in 'Introduction', *New Oxford History*

⁵ Byrnes, *New Oxford History*, p.1

⁶ Beaglehole had shown an interest in American colonial history since the 1930s and incorporated aspects of it into some of his History courses at Victoria from that time. Tim Beaglehole, *A Life of J.C. Beaglehole: New Zealand Scholar* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2006), p.438

⁷ Tim Beaglehole, *Life*, p.438

suggested that New Zealand shared a cultural inheritance with America: 'New Zealand affirms an Imperial tongue, a general loyalty; it pastures its soul impartially in fields classically English and delightfully American'.⁸ A decade later he observed that New Zealand's social and historical development displayed certain correspondences as well as significant dissimilarities with its larger Pacific neighbour. 'It is like America. It is unlike America....'⁹ In his *Introduction to New Zealand*, he outlined these comparisons and contrasts, selecting the American mid-west as his point of reference. He pointed out obvious differences: disparities of geography, of constitutional structure, of economies. Yet both countries had a capitalist economy; both experimented with 'developing democracy within the ambit of that economy'.¹⁰

Beaglehole also focused on another significant socio-cultural feature that he believed both societies shared; the pioneering ethos. He declared that America's Walt Whitman, the poet of the American vernacular and the celebrator of its common people, was 'sometime the poet of our history too' and approvingly quoted Whitman's ebullient anthem to the American pioneering spirit as apposite to New Zealand history.

We primeval forests felling,
We the rivers stemming, vexing we and piercing deep the mines within.
We the surface broad surveying, we the virgin soil upheaving,
Pioneers! O Pioneers!

For Beaglehole, then, 'the epic of America is not to us a thing unfamiliar'.¹¹

He delivered his most vigorous assertion of the importance of American cultural correspondences and transmissions with New Zealand in a 1954 address, published as *The New Zealand Scholar*. Here Beaglehole took as his exemplar Ralph Waldo Emerson's famous address, 'The American Scholar', delivered at Harvard College over a century earlier. Beaglehole approvingly cited Emerson's contention that American scholars – the 'delegated intellect[s]' – had 'listened too long to the courtly muses of Europe' and endorsed his prophecy that henceforth '[w]e will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds'.¹² He compared the New Zealand of the 1950s with

⁸ J.C. Beaglehole, *New Zealand: a Short History* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1936), p. 159

⁹ J.C. Beaglehole, *Introduction to New Zealand* (Wellington: N.Z. Dept. of Internal Affairs, Historical Branch, 1945, Foreword, unpagged.

¹⁰ J.C. Beaglehole, *Introduction*, p.31

¹¹ Beaglehole, *Introduction*, p.31. Beaglehole's invoking of Whitman also suggests some lines from Whitman's '*One's-self I Sing*': his extolling of 'the word democratic, the word En-Masse', with its exultation of what he perceived as the embodiment of the democratic, egalitarian spirit within the pioneer nation, a spirit often possessively claimed here as characteristically and distinctively belonging to New Zealand.

¹² J.C. Beaglehole, *The New Zealand Scholar* (Christchurch: Canterbury University College, 1954), p.3

Emerson's New England of the 1830s, maintaining that this particular American era was 'seminal', for during it 'the American mind became adult' by detaching itself from dependence on its intellectual and cultural ties to Europe and Britain. This translocation amounted to an 'intellectual declaration of independence'. Beaglehole found parallels with postwar New Zealand in 'this process of mental change ... this creeping on of self-awareness'.¹³ Postwar New Zealand, like New England in the 1830s, was still a province, culturally, of Britain.¹⁴ But, as in America, New Zealand's intellectual culture was changing, just as it had for Emerson and his cohorts. 'We are beginning to speak our own minds'. Beaglehole commenced his address by noting the relevance to the post-1945 New Zealand of Emerson's insights into America's intellectual life in the 1830s. He ended by quoting the words of another great American author (for 'these Americans ... speak to our condition'): the twentieth century poet Robert Frost's *The Gift Outright*. Frost wrote

The land was ours before we were the land's.
 She was our land more than a hundred years
 Before we were her people. She was ours
 In Massachusetts, in Virginia.
 But we were still England's, still colonials,
 Possessing what we were still unpossessed by.
 Possessing what we no more possess....

'For Massachusetts and Virginia read the provincial districts of New Zealand' Beaglehole declared.¹⁵ Frost's vision of American history provided insights into the potentialities for postwar New Zealand. Just as America early in the nineteenth century was shifting its gaze from Europe and Britain and looking to other sources of intellectual and emotional inspiration, so New Zealand in the post-1945 era was now ready for its intellectual and cultural declaration of independence. This, Beaglehole believed, required a 'political break' from its role as a province of the British metropolis.¹⁶ For him, the crucial catalyst for enabling the emergence of a distinctive national identity was cognitive, not constitutional; 'if we think we are a nation we are a nation'.¹⁷ Not that he attached profound or mystical significance to nationhood: 'a nation is simply a community with a little bit of emotion permanently added in....'¹⁸

¹³ Beaglehole, *Scholar*, p.5

¹⁴ Beaglehole, *Scholar*, p.6

¹⁵ Beaglehole, *Scholar*, p.24

¹⁶ Beaglehole, *Scholar*, p.5

¹⁷ Beaglehole, *Scholar*, p.13

¹⁸ Beaglehole, *Scholar*, p.13

Keith Sinclair's *History of New Zealand* and *A Destiny Apart*, and W. H. Oliver's *The Story of New Zealand*, written by a new generation of historians, did not share Beaglehole's belief that a study of American history and culture provided insights into their New Zealand counterparts. Both books were foundational nationalist histories, attempting to trace the evolution of a distinctive New Zealand national identity. According to Brynes, both 'conceptualised New Zealand within a British model'.¹⁹ Their respective interpretations placed New Zealand's relationships with its imperial power firmly at centre stage. In Sinclair's presentation, John Bull was the star actor, the Ozzie neighbour had a supporting role and Uncle Sam was reduced to occasional walk-on appearances. Sinclair's abrupt conclusion to *A Destiny Apart* portrays America as a villain, 'bullying' the virtuous and proud New Zealand who bravely defends her nuclear-free chastity.²⁰ Both historians discussed the implications of American strategic and diplomatic influence in the postwar New Zealand world, but ignored the American cultural imprint.

Although both general histories include sections on postwar New Zealand culture, their discussions are dominated by 'high' culture – poetry, the 'serious' novel, art.²¹ Two decades later, Oliver again examined New Zealand's postwar cultural history.²² His perspective was now chronologically wider, but his cultural focus and attitudes remain unchanged. Culture remained 'high' culture. American culture was still the elephant in the room. Music meant opera, symphonies and chamber music not jazz or rock 'n' roll. Literature was Curnow, not Crump. This was culture as the preserve of an educationally privileged elite.²³ The existence of other, rowdy, vigorous, popular cultural modes, with their American influences and models, remained largely unacknowledged and unexamined.

¹⁹ Brynes, 'Introduction', p. 6

²⁰ Keith Sinclair, *A Destiny Apart: New Zealand's Search for National Identity* (Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1986), p.264

²¹ The insistence of both Oliver and Sinclair on an Arnoldian identification of culture with high culture may well derive from E.H. McCormick's 1940 *Letters and Art in New Zealand*, with its premise that while a country's culture offered insights into national identity, only high culture provided the 'special interpretive access' to that culture. Chris Hilliard, 'Colonial Culture and the Province of Colonial History', *New Zealand Journal of History*, Vol.36, No.1, (April 2002), pp.82-97

²² W.H. Oliver, 'The Awakening Imagination' in Oliver, ed, *The Oxford History of New Zealand* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1981), Ch.16

²³ Oliver, in pointing out the significant growth of state patronage of the 'arts' since 1945, warns of the growth of a cultural elite, reflecting a 'wider erosion of social equality'. Oliver, 'Awakening Imagination', pp.452-3

III

The title of Bruce Mason's dramatic monologue *The End of the Golden Weather* has provided a convenient metaphor for historians' interpretations of the immediate postwar era. Laurie Barber, for example, entitled his chapter on that period 'The Golden Years'. He maintained that the 1950s was 'a golden age.... For many who experienced the affluence of the fifties the decade became an ideal state of living to which New Zealanders should legitimately aspire'.²⁴ For Redmer Yska, the country savoured the economic golden weather. '[P]rosperity was at hand after years of shortages and sacrifices, and "home appliances" filled the shelves'.²⁵ According to Keith Sinclair, 'prosperity was the all-pervasive fact in New Zealand life for two post-war decade ... it was the dominant influence on social attitudes and on politics alike'.²⁶

Yet this Edenic existence contained serpents. According to W.B. Sutch the nation was a 'wasteland', led by 'those who wanted New Zealand to be brought back to the nineteen twenties', its culture characterised by 'philistinism'.²⁷ Many accounts of the 1950s stigmatise that decade as 'the dullest...in New Zealand's history'.²⁸ A recent analysis of postwar New Zealand literature recycles the myth of a 'strange, insulated, homogenized little society, protected from the world by distance, tariff barriers and (often) plain ignorance'.²⁹ Although Bronwyn Dalley headed her chapter on the fifties in *Frontier of Dreams* 'The Golden Weather', she quickly qualified her description. 'Just mention the term "post-war"' she insisted, 'and a mantra is likely to begin among many who grew up then. Dull, boring, grey - any dowdy epithet will do to describe an oh-so-tedious time brought to life by a few rowdy teenagers'. However Dalley conceded that 'the status quo was a lot more interesting than is often assumed'.³⁰ Philippa Mein Smith also adopted 'Golden Weather' as the title of her chapter on the postwar era in her general history, but her use of the metaphor was subtle. She understood that Mason's play was about the difficulties

²⁴ Laurie Barber, *New Zealand: a Short History* (Auckland: Century Hutchinson, 1989), p.161

²⁵ Redmer Yska, *All Shook Up: the Flash Bodgie and the Rise of the New Zealand Teenager in the Fifties* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1993), p.37

²⁶ Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand*, rev.ed, (Auckland: Penguin, 2000), p.297

²⁷ W.B. Sutch, *The Quest for Security in New Zealand 1849 – 1966* (Wellington: Oxford University Press, 1966), p.408

²⁸ Bednarek, 'Put on the Margins', p.144. See also Bednarek's discussion of such perceptions, pp.1-5.

²⁹ Patrick Evans, *The Long Forgetting: Post-Colonial Literary Culture in New Zealand* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2007), p.17

³⁰ Bronwyn Dalley in Bronwyn Dalley and Gavin McLean, eds, *Frontier of Dreams: the Story of New Zealand* (Auckland: Hodder, 2005), p.329-30

inherent in change, its title a metaphor for the momentous shift from childhood to adolescence.³¹ New Zealand's national childhood was over; the fraught era of juvenescence was commencing. James Belich entitled his postwar chapter 'Golden Weather?', the ambivalent tone befitting his chapter's assessment of the postwar era. 'The clouds of doom lifted; the clouds of uncertainty did not'. Like Mein Smith, he categorised the period as a time of crucial transition, with New Zealand 'torn between two strong trends: a sense of irrevocable change, a world shattered and rebuilding in different shapes; and a desire to *restore* – to restore a past that, ideally at least, was more familiar and secure'.³²

IV

The most detailed and influential examination of the impact of American popular culture upon New Zealanders during the half century between the first world war and the early 1960s was produced in the 1980s by Roger Openshaw and Roy Shuker of Massey University's Education Department.³³ Their essentially sociological perspective was usually contained within a brief historical context. The focus of their analyses was to identify New Zealand responses to American media as episodes in cultural politics, most notably as displays of so-called moral panic. This media, they argued, threatened the cultural hegemony of New Zealand professional 'middle-class', whose solution was to use the agency of the State to exert social control over these new cultural purveyors with their troubling appeal to the wider New Zealand public.³⁴ Essential to this process was the determination to 'legitimate the cultural preferences of dominant social groups'.³⁵

Both authors also maintained that underlying these cultural guardians' concerns about American comics and films was their perception of them as deplorable and vulgar examples of 'low' culture that endangered the social, educational and artistic values allegedly inherent in 'high' culture.³⁶ Americanised popular culture in New Zealand,

³¹ Philippa Mein Smith, *Concise History of New Zealand* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 176

³² James Belich, *Paradise Reforged: a History of the New Zealanders from the 1880s to the Year 2000* (Auckland: Allen Lane: 2001), p. 297

³³ The best source for their work is Roy Shuker and Roger Openshaw, *Youth, Media and Moral Panic in New Zealand: From Hooligans to Video Nasties* (Palmerston North: Dept of Education, Massey University, 1990)

³⁴ Roy Shuker, 'Popular Culture and the Seduction of the Innocent: Children and the Cinema, 1900-1939', paper presented to Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society, Annual Conference, 1990 Proceedings, (Auckland: 1990), pp.589-599

³⁵ Shuker 'Popular Culture', p.589

³⁶ Openshaw and Shuker, *Youth, Media*, Ch.7, esp. p.93

Openshaw claimed, was 'associated with low culture'.³⁷ Both authors asserted that American cultural influences were regarded by New Zealand middle-class 'professionals' as inferior to those of Britain. For this influential group, rising to prominence during the interwar era, 'Britishness' in the forms of cultural values, represented political as well as cultural capital³⁸. Thus the prospect of these values and capital being devalued by an influx of 'inferior' American cultural products provided a strong incentive for these professionals to belittle American popular culture and attempt to control it.

The pair criticised the media for what they claimed was its crucial role in manipulating and disseminating 'public' reaction to perceived adverse consequences of comics and films.³⁹ However, the middle-class group receiving most blame for instigating public concerns about the effects of American popular culture was the clergy. New Zealand churches in the twentieth century, the Massey authors claimed, were losing numbers and hence their leaders' social and cultural authority and control were becoming devalued. Thus they had a 'vested interest' in promoting, via a willing media, concerns about juvenile delinquency and immorality.⁴⁰

During the 1980s, Openshaw argued, American popular culture came to be regarded in New Zealand as a 'cultural villain'. Its reprehensibility largely arose from being perceived - especially by those 'accredited to speak for the nation' - as a barrier to the process, much desired by them, of fostering a unique, bi-racial national identity. In fact, he suggested, having America as cultural villain facilitated that process, by providing New Zealanders, not only with a 'reference point beyond themselves' but also by reassuring them that they were unique, *not* Americans, 'a place apart'.⁴¹

Openshaw and Shuker's work had considerable influence. Their conclusions have been frequently summarised or cited in both general texts and in more specialized studies of social histories of the postwar era. This helps explain such discourses' emphasis on moral panics and juvenile delinquency as distinctive features of that period. Unfortunately, their reliance on imposing the inflexible template of moral panic on postwar socio-cultural events and trends has inhibited a more flexible and wider-ranging analysis. The Massey scholars' academic interest in the effects of the impact of modern, mainly American, media on the

³⁷ Roger Openshaw, "'The Glare of Broadway': Some New Zealand Reactions to the Perceived Americanisation of Youth", *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, Vol.10 No.1, (July 1991), p.57

³⁸ Openshaw, "'Glare of Broadway'", p.48

³⁹ Shuker and Openshaw, *Youth, Media*, p.10

⁴⁰ Shuker and Openshaw, *Youth, Media*, p.23

⁴¹ Openshaw, "'Glare of Broadway'", p.57

young, and the role of those middle-class professionals who perceived it as pernicious, also resulted in a tendency for others to focus on the reactions of these groups rather than extend the scope of inquiry to include a much wider and more representative range of New Zealanders.

Furthermore, when Openshaw and Shuker, along with those historians who incorporated their conclusions in their work, discuss moral panic on the part of the New Zealand public, they are essentially conflating the concerns of sections of an educationally privileged, professional elite with the much wider New Zealand in general. This conflation arises not only from a reliance on the flawed paradigm of moral panic, but also from Openshaw and Shuker's limited range of evidence, which relies heavily on official departmental documents and reports, communications from educational professionals and editorials from Palmerston North newspapers. Much of the material selected from this 'official' cache was unfavourably disposed to American culture. However, the extensive range of public attitudes on issues of American cultural influence, to be found, for example, in letters to the editor, periodical articles, popular magazines, music and film reviews, biographies and literature, and submissions to the Mazengarb inquiry, was not adequately canvassed. Consequently, the reader is left with the impression that the great mass of New Zealanders had an overwhelmingly negative attitude towards American popular culture.

Despite these deficiencies and lacunae, Openshaw and Shuker deserve credit for attempting to draw attention to the significance of the impact of American culture on New Zealanders in the post-1914 era generally and the post-1945 decade in particular. They also recognised that this impact was a matter of public, professional and political concern, and they provided useful parameters for analysing reactions to that impact. Finally, both make it clear that American cultural influences, and the various responses they induced, did not suddenly arrive with the American troops in 1942, but had been present for several decades.

V

The 1980s also revealed another aspect of the increasing local academic interest in American history, the comparative histories of the two nations, and also, temporarily, the American cultural impact on New Zealand. The focus of this historical scrutiny was Jock

Phillips who wrote or edited several publications on these topics.⁴² In one such article Phillips discussed this unprecedented attention to the comparative history of the two Pacific neighbours.⁴³ American history, he suggested, with its ‘focus on local conditions and frontier experience, rather than the import of tradition’ now provided New Zealand historians, some of whom, like Phillips, had been Fulbright scholars at American universities, with a fresh perspective.⁴⁴ As Phillips noted, such studies suggested that the two countries shared certain fundamental ideological values: egalitarianism, frontier initiative, pragmatism, pioneer heritage, as well as more statistically valid features, such as unbalanced sex ratios and migration patterns.⁴⁵ The study of American history itself held especial appeal for those New Zealand nationalist historians who wanted to ‘get out from under’ the smothering overlay of British history.⁴⁶

In 1987 Phillips outlined what he considered to be the main influences of American culture on postwar New Zealand.⁴⁷ He briefly considered American popular culture as a form of cultural imperialism, but concluded that, far from acting as an ‘indoctrination agency’ for American foreign policy, it may well have been ‘that the reverse is the case’.⁴⁸ Indeed, he suggested that the continuing pervasive impact of American culture might have ‘served to alienate ... [New Zealanders] from America and things American’. However, Phillips believed there was little evidence to suggest that New Zealanders were ‘unwilling customers’ for that culture. It was unlikely they would of their volition watch and listen to the media of a culture of which they disapproved.⁴⁹

Geoff Lealand argued in 1985 that ‘[v]irtually all elements of High Culture were imported from Bloomsbury or Belgrave’, but that this British model had now become

⁴² Phillips edited *New Worlds? The Comparative History of New Zealand and the United States* (Wellington: NZ-US Education Foundation/ Stout Research Centre, 1989) and wrote the Introduction to *New Worlds*; ‘The Influence of American culture on New Zealand Since the Second World War’ in Ann Trotter, ed, *New Zealand Culture and the United States: the Papers of the Twenty-second Foreign Policy School, 1987* (Dunedin: University Extension, University of Otago, 1987); co-author with Ellen Ellis, *Brief Encounter: American Forces and the New Zealand People* (Wellington: Historical Branch, Dept of Internal Affairs), 1992. See also Melanie Nolan, ‘New World Comparisons’, <<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/lab/88/nolan.html>>

⁴³ Phillips, Introduction’ - *New Worlds?* pp. 4-8

⁴⁴ Phillips, ‘Introduction’ – *New Worlds?* p.4

⁴⁵ Phillips, ‘Introduction’ – *New Worlds?* pp. 6-8

⁴⁶ Phillips, ‘Introduction’ – *New Worlds?* p.4

⁴⁷ Jock Phillips, ‘The Influence of American Culture on New Zealand Since the Second World War’ in Ann Trotter, ed, *New Zealand, Canada and the United States* (Dunedin: University Extension Dept, University of Otago, 1987).

⁴⁸ Phillips, ‘Influence of American Culture’, p.37

⁴⁹ Phillips, ‘Influence of American Culture’, p.37

exhausted.⁵⁰ In the same journal, Leonard Wilcox maintained that New Zealanders' antagonism towards American culture was 'permeated with all the biases of a genteel provincial aristocracy towards urban and popular cultural forms'. Furthermore, New Zealand intellectuals appropriated 'high' culture in order to construct a national culture.⁵¹ A year later Phillips extended these themes by arguing that popular culture in New Zealand was perceived by an 'educationally-based' middle class as the domain of American influences, whereas 'high' culture was perceived as British in orientation. Hence American culture was regarded by this educational elite - swollen by the postwar growth of universities, and exerting increasing influence both in government and opinion-making - as vulgar, and aesthetically and morally inferior. Thus there was a 'high cultural prejudice' against America, an animus which Phillips believed was transposed eventually into official foreign policy in the 1980s. For Phillips the crucial question was whether 'this elite, these patrons of high culture ...remained consistently hostile to American cultural values since the Second World War?' He concluded that during the immediate postwar decade New Zealand high culture – and presumably its educationally elite standard-bearers – was indeed antipathetic to the popular culture of America.⁵²

Phillips cast a skeptical eye on interpretations of that culture that claimed that it represented cultural imperialism. However, the 1980s witnessed a revival of this discourse, which both reiterated the claims of the postwar left that American popular culture was an invasive and malignant force endangering New Zealand, and resuscitated late 1960s' counter-culture rhetoric about America as the embodiment of the social and cultural ills of capitalism. When in 1984 the Lange government refused to admit American naval vessels to New Zealand ports because they might be nuclear-armed, the consequent heavy-handed American diplomatic and strategic responses 'dramatised', in Malcolm McKinnon's words, 'what might be called the imperialist view' of that relationship.⁵³ He also noted that not only those on the left had concerns about American imperialism, cultural or otherwise; conservatives were also suspicious of American influences, which could be seen as challenging rather than supporting the status quo.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Geoff Lealand, 'Preface: New Zealand Literature and Culture', *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol.19 No.2, (Fall 1985), pp.63-4

⁵¹ Leonard Wilcox, Introduction, 'New Zealand Literature and Culture', *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol.19 No.2, (Fall 1985), p.68; 71

⁵² Phillips, 'Influence of American Culture', pp.37-40

⁵³ Malcolm McKinnon, ed, *The American Connection: Essays From the Stout Centre Conference* (Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1988), 'Introduction', p.1

⁵⁴ McKinnon, 'Introduction', p.1



Figure 2. Suspicions of postwar (1946) American intentions in the Pacific⁵⁵

In 1986 the historical and cultural context of this relationship was examined during a conference at Wellington's Stout Research Centre; the resultant papers provide insights into contemporary academic perceptions about the impact of American culture in New Zealand.⁵⁶ Immediate postwar suspicions of U.S. military intentions in the Pacific, summarised in Figure 2, were now augmented by contributors such as Roger Horrocks, Patrick Day and Geoff Lealand, who used the template of cultural imperialism to mould their arguments about the influences of American cinema, television and music. For them, American cultural influence in the forms of media, fashions, and values had an overwhelming and deleterious impact on New Zealanders.⁵⁷ For example, Day approvingly cited Herbert Schiller's *Mass Communication and American Empire* (1969), which presented American culture as the spearhead of the attempt by the American military-

⁵⁵ *The Standard*, 21 March 1946, p.1. Cartoonist unknown.

⁵⁶ Published as Malcolm McKinnon, ed, *The American Connection: Essays From the Stout Centre Conference* (Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1988), 'Introduction'

⁵⁷ McKinnon, 'Introduction', p.2

industrial complex to achieve world-wide military and economic dominance.⁵⁸ Day also presented an Arnoldian-Leavisite elitist attitude towards both the culture and the New Zealanders it allegedly imperiled. Not only was that culture tainted because it was ‘manufactured’. It was also, in Day’s opinion, ‘outside the control of those who receive it. In such circumstances the sense people make of their experiences is not a sense of their own creation and *may not be in their best interests*’.⁵⁹

VI

Jim McAloon described James Belich’s *Paradise Reforged* as ‘the most influential recent account’ of 20th century New Zealand history.⁶⁰ Belich’s crucial thesis, ‘the master variable of New Zealand history’ in McAloon’s words, was that of ‘recolonisation’ – the ‘renewal and reshaping of links between colony and metropolis after an earlier period of colonisation’.⁶¹ New Zealand developed – or regressed – for almost a century from the 1880s as a society reliant on exporting a few pastoral staples to Britain, and importing industrial and cultural staples from that motherland. New Zealanders, Belich insists, far from asserting their independence from ‘Home’, instead embraced Britannia more tightly.⁶² Symbiotic the relationship may have been, but it was one in which the imperial power was, economically, culturally and politically, the dominant partner, a situation that persisted until the 1970s.⁶³ ‘[E]ssentially, New Zealand became a town supply district of London. London became the cultural capital of New Zealand’.⁶⁴ More recently, Felicity Barnes has followed Belich in arguing that the U.K. exerted a cultural monopoly over New Zealand until the 1940s and even beyond.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ Patrick Day, ‘Popular Culture’ in McKinnon, *American Connection*, p.79

⁵⁹ Day, ‘Popular Culture’, p.83. My emphasis.

⁶⁰ Jim McAloon, ‘Unsettling Recolonization: Labourism, Keynesianism and Australasia from the 1890s to the 1950s’, *Thesis Eleven* No.92, (February 2008), pp.50-69

⁶¹ Belich, *Paradise Reforged*, p.547; p. 29; also pp. 394-425

⁶² In his most recent work, Belich reframes this process of recolonisation, extending its scope to include what he calls the ‘newlands’, which included western America as well as Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, and represented the ‘British flank of the Anglo-World’. Recolonisation was ‘a process of reintegration’, in which colonising forces, after an initial outward explosion were ‘reeled back, re-secured firmly to the metropolis by recolonisation’.⁶² Recolonisation created a virtual bridge, along which ‘economic products flowed from newland to old, and cultural products the other way. The cultural products included collective attitudes and identities....’ James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: the Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1873 -1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.250

⁶³ Belich, *Paradise Reforged*, p.231

⁶⁴ Belich, *Paradise Reforged*, p.30

⁶⁵ Felicity Barnes, ‘New Zealand’s London: the Metropolis and New Zealand’s Culture, 1890-1940’, (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Auckland, 2008), pp.277-9

Belich's theory would appear to negate claims about American cultural influences on New Zealand in the twentieth century, including the postwar years, when recolonisation was allegedly at its height. Ironically, in *Paradise Reforged* he vividly demonstrates the importance of American cultural and material imports into New Zealand during the twentieth century. Highlighting the crucial importance of technological change in the interwar years, Belich pointed out that during this period movies, music, radio and motor vehicles were the 'potential vectors of an American cultural invasion, spearheaded by Hollywood, that was considered to be 'neither sufficiently moral nor sufficiently British' and which threatened both cultural recolonisation and moral 'harmony' within the dominion.⁶⁶ He admitted that the impact of new U.S. media challenged recolonisation, arousing more concerns about the influence of American global culture than had their pre-twentieth century manifestations.⁶⁷ These earlier demonstrations of American cultural influence, ranging from biota to technology and ideas, were, he claimed, 'openly admired'. But 'as cultural recolonisation ... intensified... American influence came to be viewed with increasing suspicion by New Zealand formal culture', although Belich surprisingly declares that its popular culture was 'less suspicious'.⁶⁸ Despite having made an excellent argument for the increasing volume and influence of American culture in New Zealand, he concluded that 'the 1918-39 period was only the first round in a long contest between recolonial and American 'global' culture. But recolonisation did win the round on points'.⁶⁹

Belich's verdict received its most convincing rebuttal at the hands of Miles Fairburn in his essay 'Is There a Good Case For New Zealand Exceptionalism?'.⁷⁰ Fairburn maintains that by the midcentury New Zealand was the world's most globalised society. He regarded the impact of Australian and American culture from the 1920s to the 1960s as crucial in this process. He also noted that an essential and distinctive characteristic of New Zealanders' cultural development: their willingness to explore, appropriate and adapt global cultural products. This essentially pragmatic attitude was indeed typical of the great majority of the New Zealand public during the interwar and immediate postwar eras. What Fairburn fails to

⁶⁶ Belich, *Paradise Reforged*, p.251-2

⁶⁷ Belich, *Paradise Reforged*, p.252

⁶⁸ Belich, *Paradise Reforged*, p.252

⁶⁹ Belich, *Paradise Reforged*, p.254

⁷⁰ Miles Fairburn, 'Is There a Good Case for New Zealand Exceptionalism?' in Tony Ballantyne & Brian Montgomery, eds, *Disputed Histories: Imagining New Zealand's Pasts* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2006), pp.143-167

emphasise is that it was certainly not shared by many of the educational elites and cultural arbiters.

VII

When both Oliver and Sinclair concluded their respective general histories with assessments of the current condition of culture in New Zealand, their surveys presumed culture was synonymous with 'high' culture. As Chris Hilliard observed, both historians operated from E.H. McCormick's seminal premise in his centennial work *Letters and Art in New Zealand*: that the contributions of people of 'high' culture were privileged as providing insights into the national culture.⁷¹ Rachel Barrowman's study of New Zealand creative artists during the 1930-1950 era also illustrates this point, while noting that almost all these artists had left-wing sympathies. She makes it clear that most of them perceived New Zealand society and its populace to be puritanical, uncritical, conformist and passive.⁷²

Three decades after Oliver and Sinclair overlooked popular culture as a crucial feature of New Zealand's cultural history, Caroline Daley's chapter on socio-cultural matters in *The New Oxford History of New Zealand* attempted to invert their perspective. Entitling her chapter 'Modernity, Consumption, and Leisure', Daley asserted that it focused on "'popular" rather than "high" culture, on the activities of the masses rather than the few'. She rejected those approaches to cultural history which relied on the 'claims of intellectuals who bemoaned the fact that New Zealand was "behind the times", who labeled it conservative and felt isolated from the avant-garde. The carping critique of the few is not the focus here'.⁷³ Instead, Daley proclaimed that her purpose was to consider the culture of the many New Zealanders, not the few.

Daley also dismissed the McCormick-Sinclair-Oliver argument that the evolution of New Zealand's arts and letters culture revealed the development of a unique cultural history. Instead, she insisted that her focus on modernity, consumption and leisure 'encourage[d] New Zealand's history to be placed within a transnational framework'.⁷⁴ By way of illustration, Daley cited Hollywood films and American radio programmes as sources of

⁷¹ Chris Hilliard, 'Colonial Culture and the Province of Cultural History', *NZJH*, 36, 1 (2002, 2002) <www.arts.auckland.ac.nz/.../ChrisHilliard-ColonialCulture-andthe-ProvinceofCulturalHistory.pdf> p.1

⁷² Rachel Barrowman, *A Popular Vision: the Arts and the Left in New Zealand 1930-1950* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1991), *passim*

⁷³ Caroline Daley, 'Modernity, Consumption, and Leisure' in Byrnes, *New Oxford History*, p.426

⁷⁴ Daley, 'Modernity' p.425

popular New Zealand leisure pastimes during the interwar years.⁷⁵ She also adopted Openshaw and Shuker's emphasis on the key role of the middle class, determined from the late nineteenth century to impose their social and cultural values on other elements of the New Zealand population. Daley associated this middle class with a Protestant work ethic and a puritanical attitude towards enjoyment, concerned about the dubious uses to which the working class might put their leisure time.⁷⁶ These social and cultural guardians disapproved of what Daley termed 'irrational recreation' – activities such as reading comics, betting on horses and watching frivolous movies. Accordingly, they promoted 'rational recreation', activities such as organized sports, W.E.A. groups, Y.M.C.A.s and Scouting organizations, aiming to 'control and improve both the minds and bodies of the working-classes so that they would become better citizens and workers'. This insistence on rational recreation, Daley claims, encouraged a 'culture of constraint' in New Zealand.⁷⁷

Daley's article stressed the need to extend the scope of culture beyond the study of those artistic and literary modes favoured by the country's educational and social elites in order to include the popular culture endorsed by the wider New Zealand public. Unfortunately, as Richard Waterhouse has noted, despite 'the preoccupation with cultural history by Australian, American and British historians', in the massive volume in which her chapter appears 'there is very little attention paid to the history of New Zealand culture either of the popular or elite kind'.⁷⁸ A search of the book's contents also reveals a disregard for examining the impact of American culture on New Zealanders in the twentieth century. This neglect is all the more surprising considering that since the seventeenth century American culture and its implications for other societies have been a constant source of historical and philosophical inquiry amongst British, French and German intellectuals, including de Tocqueville, Goethe, Huizanga and Adorno.

For the last twenty-five years the study of how societies respond to American popular culture has become an important feature of academic research from the U.S.A. itself to Britain and western Europe. Yet most New Zealand historians have paid insufficient attention to the recent shifts in interpretation and analysis. A study of how New Zealanders reacted to this twentieth century phenomenon demands a more comprehensive and inclusive approach than a reliance on theories of cultural imperialism, Leavisite high bourgeois

⁷⁵ Daley, 'Modernity', p.425

⁷⁶ Daley, 'Modernity', p.427

⁷⁷ Daley, 'Modernity', p.427; 432

⁷⁸ Richard Waterhouse, review of *The New Oxford History of New Zealand*, in *New Zealand Journal of History* Vol.43, No.2 (October 2009), p.208.

cultural assumptions, or schema of moral panic, filtered through the sensibilities of small, unrepresentative elites often contemptuous of the wider public.

Part Two

I

In order to more thoroughly investigate New Zealand responses to American culture, it is necessary to recognise that they frequently entail reactions to representations of that country. America, it would seem, cannot be presented or examined unmediated. The reality and the accuracy of these emblems, their congruence with the actual America, remain disputable. In 1928 the Dutch cultural critic Menno ter Braak warned of the dangers of mistaking an America in quotation marks, a symbolic location and a construct of the mind, for the actual America. In his essay, 'Why I Reject "America"' ter Braak observed that "America" was 'a composite image based on the perception of ominous trends that are linked to America as the country and the culture characteristically ... displaying them.' He concluded: "'America" I reject. Now we can turn to the problem of America'.⁷⁹ Several decades later another Dutch cultural critic, Rob Kroes referred to an 'imaginary America that has stalked for centuries through the European mind'.⁸⁰ In viewing America, Europeans were actually observing and commenting on an imagined America, 'a construct, an image, a fantasma'. They composed for themselves a repertoire of fantasies about that country and in so doing 'created a metaphorical space to visualize the contrast between America and Europe'. The nation had become a figure of speech and a code word.⁸¹

The most sustained treatment of this fundamental trope can be found in the work of the American political scientist, James Ceaser. He traced the steps by which European intellectuals created what he felicitously calls a 'symbolic America', a representation detached from the real America. Preoccupied with America as symbol rather than with actual America, these intellectuals had made that country a philosophical category and a

⁷⁹ Rob Kroes, 'Introduction', John Dean and Jean-Paul Gabilliet, "Preface: Ever the Twain Shall Meet" in John Dean and Jean-Paul Gabilliet, eds, *European Readings of American Popular Culture* (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), p.xxxvi

⁸⁰ Rob Kroes, Section 1, 'American Studies in Europe or: Brother, Can You Spare a Paradigm?' in *Transatlantica*, [En Ligne], <<http://transatlantica.revues.org/pdf/3271/2001>>, mis en ligne le 23 mars 2006, accessed 8 April 2010.

⁸¹ Kroes, *If You've Seen One, You've Seen The Mall* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996), p.15; Kroes, 'Paradigm?' Section 3; Kroes, 'Introduction' p.xxxii

literary metaphor, uncoupled from any attachment to the real country or its people.⁸² ‘No-one’, Ceaser dryly noted, ‘...speaks of New Zealandism; yet America alone of all nations had attained the status of a pure abstraction’.⁸³ Like Bourdieu, Ceaser observes that these symbols are exploited by individuals and groups as they participate in displays of socio-cultural power and contestation. Ceaser ‘s arguments also utilise Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic domination, in which socio-cultural hierarchies are justified or protected by the definition and manipulation of symbolic capital.⁸⁴

Central to Ceaser’s argument is his demonstration of the crucial role that eighteenth century scientific thought played in this process. Highly respectable philosopher-scientists constructed an enduring trope about America – its essential degeneracy. Buffon, de Pauw and Raynal all portrayed America as a place of human and animal degeneracy and monstrosity. ‘Everything there is degenerate, or monstrous’ according to de Pauw. Plants, animals, even people, declined in febrility and vigour when transplanted from Europe to America. The inhabitants of America, whether human, animal or botanic, were smaller, shorter and weaker than those of Europe.⁸⁵ In vain did Jefferson send, at great expense, a seven foot stuffed moose from Vermont to be stationed inside the entry to his Paris hotel to disprove such contentions.⁸⁶

Although the science behind this degeneracy thesis has now been rejected, its essential conclusion was still used in twentieth century European constructions of America. ‘Symbolic America’, Ceasar declared,

has had a long-standing, direct, and intimate connection to racist thinking. From the founding of anthropology in the late eighteenth century ... until the elaboration of Nazi

⁸² James Ceaser, *Reconstructing America: the Symbol of America in Modern Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p.76; Ceaser, ‘A Genealogy of Anti-Americanism’, <[www.thepublicinterest/Marcharchives/2003summer/article/html](http://www.thepublicinterest.org/Marcharchives/2003summer/article/html)> accessed 7 May 2009, unpagged; Ceaser, *Reconstructing America*, pp.1-2

⁸³ James Ceaser, ‘Genealogy’ of Anti-Americanism’; *Reconstructing America*, pp.1-2

⁸⁴ See Jane Fulcher’s discussion in her article ‘Symbolic Domination and Contestation in French Music: Shifting the Paradigm From Adorno to Bourdieu’, in Victoria Johnson et al, eds, *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Online 2011, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511481734002>>, pp.312-329, esp. pp.313-315, accessed 19 February, 2011

⁸⁵ Ceaser, *Reconstructing America*, pp.20-1; 38; 24;19. Philippe Roger claims that during the eighteenth century America’s allegedly degraded and vicious *nature* that inspired fear amongst French intellectuals. A century later this fear had been transposed ‘from nature to culture, from the deadly wilderness to the deadening metropolis....’ Philippe Roger, *The American Enemy: a Story of French Anti-Americanism* trans. Sharon Bowman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p.346. Alan Levine’s discussion of the presentation of ‘Indians’ in European thought suggests that ‘European perceptions of America have been mistaken from the very beginning’. Columbus, for example, variously portrayed the inhabitants of the New World as Cyclops, Amazons, Sirens, people with tails and people with dog-faces. ‘This began a pattern of pre-formed opinions dictating what is supposedly found in America’. Alan Levine, ‘The Idea of America in European Political Thought: 1492 – 9/11’, paper presented at The University of Wisconsin Political Workshop, Madison, WI, April, 7, 2006

⁸⁶ Roger, *American Enemy*, p.28

theories about the United States in the 1930s, America has symbolized in various ways the meaning of race in human affairs.... Much of the content of symbolic America today was worked out in racist thinking and then applied to non-racist discussions of technology and culture. Ideas influenced by racism thus persist at the vanguard of progressive thought, which depicts the United States as the land of diminished intelligence, low tastes, and cultural homogenisation.⁸⁷

II

Philippe Roger's extensive study of French anti-Americanism also concluded that it employed 'the stencil of a racial antagonism that went back to the dawn of time'. This racism combined fear of the primitive with a more recent malice against America as the latest and most threatening manifestation of Anglo-Saxon culture. It too linked the 'weight of a past loaded down with age-old animosity' with a new burden – the United States as the barbaric acolyte of the heathen god of modernity. After the civil war, Roger argued, racial typology 'rivet[ed] French anti-Americanism to the ethnicised figure of the Yankee', who was depicted as the accomplice of negroes, the brutal, industrialized vanquisher of a more refined and agrarian Latin civilization gallantly upholding European values.⁸⁸

Both Ceaser and Roger identify the French philosopher Gobineau, writing in the 1850s, as the crucial figure in the racist symbolism of America. Gobineau believed that race was the crucial force underlying historical change, the vital principle underwriting the rise and fall of nations. Since he insisted that races and ethnic groups were hierarchically scaled according to perceived qualities such as intelligence, strength and courage, America with its racially mixed population was proscribed as the noxious location of a mongrelised and homogenised race.⁸⁹

Martin Heidegger incorporated Gobineau's ideas in his depiction of twentieth century American life. '[W]ith Heidegger', Ceaser believes, 'America was transformed from

⁸⁷ Ceaser, *Reconstructing America*, pp.87-8; 'The word "America" has become a postmodern symbol of disfigurement, disease, and distortion' (p.87). Even Matthew Arnold incorporated a vein of racism, or more specifically, anti-Semitism, into his view of America, which was, he claimed 'just ourselves, with the Barbarians quite left out, and the Populace nearly. This leaves the Philistines for the great bulk of the Nation; - a livelier sort of Philistine than ours... And as we have found that the strongest and most vital part of English Philistinism was the Puritan and Hebraising middle class, and that its Hebraising keeps it from culture and totality, so it is notorious that the people of the United States issues from this class, and reproduces its tendencies, - its narrow conception of man's spiritual range and of his one thing needful. From Maine to Florida, and back again, all America Hebraise'. Matthew Arnold, 'Culture and Anarchy' and Other Writings ed. Stefan Collini, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 199

⁸⁸ Roger, *American Enemy*, pp.345-6; p.178; 449. Roger refers to 'a masochistic phantasmagoria in which the Frenchman took the place of the freed native – just like the Southern landowners had become "slaves" under the crushing heels of the Yankee victors'. *American Enemy*, p.333

⁸⁹ Ceaser, *Reconstructing America*, pp.6-7; 93;104; 'Genealogy of Anti-Americanism', p.3

a country to a major literary and philosophic category....'⁹⁰ Whereas Buffon and de Pauw had represented America in terms of physical degeneracy and deformation, Heidegger regarded the degeneracy as intellectual and cultural rather than biological or botanical. While the pair had depicted American life in all its forms as diminutive and enfeebled, for Heidegger this degradation became a 'distortion in the direction of the mass, the uniform, the monstrous, and the grotesque'.⁹¹ He argued that America, far from being primitive, was, in his famous description, 'the original version of modernity', embodying 'the emerging monstrousness of modern times'.⁹² For Heidegger and others on the right, such as Spengler, as well as those on the left, such as the Frankfurt School, America represented technologism, which equated with conformity, mediocrity and a materialism which mechanised society and destroyed human spirituality.⁹³ Technology dominated the modern world, a sinister force that enveloped culture and politics. This was why Heidegger described America as the *katastrophenhaft* and why in much postmodern thought the United States became the symbol for oppression.⁹⁴

The attribution of this unique status to the U.S.A. also owed much to the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard. In *America* he maintained that the 'real' America had been replaced by a copy. The various discourses of twentieth century America, its films, art, and literature had become more real and more meaningful than the original, actual nation.⁹⁵ America had become a 'hyperreality', a place without a real origin, the locus of a new way of perceiving the world.⁹⁶ It represented the triumph of the desire for the imaginary, severed from historical substance and reality. Baudrillard and his fellow intellectuals used academically fashionable literary theories and philosophical ideas to construct America into what Ceaser called 'a concept of philosophy and a trope of literature'. It had become an abstraction and a fiction; it was no longer a country. Hence Ceaser's determination to liberate 'a country from the mastery of a metaphor and the tyranny of a trope'.⁹⁷

Ceaser's argument has been elaborated by several American and European academics. George McKay regarded America and its cultural products as constituting a

⁹⁰ Ceaser, *Reconstructing America*, p.106; p.187

⁹¹ Ceaser, *Reconstructing America*, p.192

⁹² cited Ceaser, *Reconstructing America*, p.233

⁹³ Alan Levine, 'The Idea of America in European Political Thought: 1492 – 9/11'. Unpagged paper, University of Wisconsin Political Philosophy Workshop, Madison, WI, April 7, 2006

⁹⁴ See Ceaser, *Reconstructing America* p.192; 233, p.9

⁹⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *America*, tr. Chris Turner, (London: Verso, 1988 (1992), pp.59-60; Richard Lane, *Jean Baudrillard*, (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2007), pp.115-119

⁹⁶ Lane, *Baudrillard*, pp.86-87

⁹⁷ Ceaser, *Reconstructing America*, p.1, 5

screen on which people around the world projected their own images and fantasies.

“America” becomes what we are not, what we want it to be, what we want to be. It does not matter whether this bears any similarity to *the real thing*.⁹⁸ Russell Berman maintained that such responses constituted

an enormous stereotype driven by fears regarding democracy and capitalism; concerns embedded in national cultural elites, resentful of their compatriots’ preference, even demand, for the American lifestyle and, its perceived promise of freedom. Ultimately, that stereotype invoked a fundamental philosophic issue: the dubious relationship of rhetoric to the “Real.”⁹⁹

Berman and Ceaser identified intellectuals as the driving force behind such symbolising rhetoric.¹⁰⁰ More recently, Philippe Roger has demonstrated how French intellectual elites have, over decades, produced a ‘semantic bloc’ of jaundiced representations of American culture, politics and behaviours. His investigation concluded that French anti-Americanism had long been ‘the prerogative of an intelligentsia that had appointed itself guardian of threatened values’.¹⁰¹ Negative responses to American culture, Roger maintained, represented the angry reaction of a clerisy on both the right and the left, fiercely protective of their trusteeship of Gallic ‘high’ culture. Its values, educative and civilizing, were to be defended against the vulgarities of American popular culture, which aimed merely to entertain. By the mid-twentieth century, the French intelligentsia had assigned themselves the cultural and patriotic duty of protecting the masses from themselves. By the end of the millennium, they had triumphed. The French public had accepted their negative stereotyping of America and its culture.¹⁰²

III

‘Where would Europe be without America?’ inquired Rob Kroes. He maintained that Europeans required America as

⁹⁸ McKay, p.40. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁹ Russell Berman, ‘Anti-Americanism and Americanization’ in Alexander Stephan, *Americanization and Anti-Americanism* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), pp.17-23; 11

¹⁰⁰ The French Roman Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain argued in *Reflections on America* (1958) that the Old World elitist critique of ‘confusing spirituality with an aristocratic contempt for any improvement in material life’ lay behind their accusations that American society and culture was obsessed with materialism. See Thomas Albert, ‘Maritain’s America’ in *First Things*, No.169, (Jan. 2007), pp.13-16

¹⁰¹ Roger, *American Enemy*, pp. 78, 272

¹⁰² Roger, *American Enemy*, pp.426 – 433; 449, 45.1 Richard Kuisel, however, sees similar concerns embodied in the reactions of non-elite French, such as the industrialists and trade unionists visiting the U.S.A. after 1945, who, he claims, ‘were projecting onto America their fears for France, and, to a lesser extent, their hopes as well’. Richard Kuisel, *Seducing the French: the Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p.xi

a point of reference, a yardstick, a counterpoint. In intellectual reflections on the course and destinies of their countries and culture, America has become part of a process of triangulation, serving as a model for rejection or emulation, providing views of a future seen either in a negative or positive light. America has become a *tertium comparationis* in culture wars elsewhere, centering on the discourse concerning the national identity....¹⁰³

For some Europeans, America represented a disturbing vision of the future – one of greed, materialism, and a shallow mass culture that was the antithesis of Europe’s deep and meaningful culture. For others, it was a vision of change, hope and initiative, providing the prospect of rejuvenating a tumescent European culture, nurturing ‘the most authentic revolutionary currents of the [twentieth] century’, exemplified by its youth culture and feminist and ecological concerns as well as its technological advances.¹⁰⁴ This European construct of America as a source of contrast and counterpoint provides nationalities like the French with a means of self-definition.¹⁰⁵ As Richard Kuisel notes, French objections to America and its culture are projections of French anxieties about themselves.¹⁰⁶

European intellectuals from the eighteenth through to the twenty-first centuries perceived America as demolishing European hierarchies of cultural taste. Tocqueville described European society and culture in images of community, hierarchy, constraint and depth, but viewed its American counterparts as individual, egalitarian, boundless and flat. The levelling effects of America’s emphasis on social equality abraded its cultural

¹⁰³ Rob Kroes, ‘American Empire and Cultural Imperialism – a Clash of Imagined Communities’ in John Dean & Jean-Paul Gabillet, *European Readings of American Popular Culture* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1996), p.xxv. Others have made the same point. As George McKay observed, European intellectuals like Jean Baudrillard frequently defined themselves and their culture in relation to America. MacKay, ‘Americanization and Popular Culture’ in McKay, ed, *Yankee Go Home (& Take Me With You): Americanization and Popular Culture* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp.12-13. Russell Berman also noted that from the earliest contacts with the New World, Europeans projected onto America their fears about ‘brute nature, the presumed absence of history, and a non-differentiated homogeneity’, all of which became the standard tropes of anti-Americanism. Berman, ‘Anti-Americanism’, p.16

¹⁰⁴ Rob Kroes, ‘Introduction’ Dean & Gabillet, pxxxii; p.xxvi; Irwin Wall, ‘From Anti-Americanism to Francophobia: the Saga of French and American Intellectuals’, in *French Historical Studies*, Vol.18, No.4 (Autumn 1994), p.1096

¹⁰⁵ These European projections of fears, and also hopes, can be found as early as Columbus and Shakespeare. *The Tempest*, Kroes believes, provides in the figure of Caliban an early example of Europeans’ fantasising about America. The savage Indian Caliban is a projection of European fears and fascinations with the forbidden and the uncivilized, the ‘reservoir of chaos and destruction’. As Wagnleitner points out, to many Europeans, America was the Other, to be feared and rejected, yet regarded with amazement. America had been assigned a role: a festering swamp, the ‘wasteland of civilization’. Yet we need to remember that at the conclusion of *The Tempest* Miranda exclaims in wonder and pleasure ‘O Brave new world / that has such people in’t’ and John Donne compared the wonders and pleasures of that new world with those of a lover’s body: ‘Be thou my America, my new found land’. In the 1720s the Irish philosopher George Berkeley depicted the New World as a pastoral paradise, describing it as ‘the seat of innocence, Where nature guides and virtue rules.... Not such as Europe breeds in decay’. When Jean de Crevecoeur famously described eighteenth century America his attitude was summarised by one of his chapter headings: ‘What, Then, is the American, This New Man?’ For Crevecoeur, the American was the new Adam. ‘Everything has tended to regenerate them: new laws, a new mode of living, a new social system: here they become men’. Kroes, ‘Introduction: America and Europe’, pp.xxviii-xxvix; Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonisation and the Cold War: the Cultural Invasion of the United States in Austria After the Second World War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), p.17

¹⁰⁶ Richard Kuisel, *Seducing the French: the Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993)

landscape. During the interwar years of the twentieth century both Georges Duhamel and Andre Siegfried contrasted the ‘wasteland’ of American culture, complacent, conformist and superficial, with its supposedly vigorous, individualistic and civilized French counterpart. Berman described this feature as ‘predemocratic anti-Americanism’. It involved an aristocratic aversion to the democratic life, seen as vulgar and lacking quality, a view transmuted into a disdain for democratic culture. For the European cultural elites, America’s democratic, commercial culture could never advance beyond the vulgar and the superficial.¹⁰⁷

Whereas the traditional European cultural aesthetic emphasised closure and limitation, American culture preferred open-endedness, accessibility and recombination. These features upset European cultural savants. Europe’s cultural heritage was supposedly a model of organic and holistic cohesion, with an emphasis on great and abiding works, but American culture shamelessly appropriated and detached fragments of that aesthetic heritage from their seamless setting. Features formerly considered ephemeral or barbaric were also taken from other cultures, such as Afro-American and Hispanic and, emulating American industrial practice, became modified, recycled and reassembled into new cultural entities, disregarding their original contextual and historical specificities.¹⁰⁸ This American fondness for bricolage meant that the culturally transcendent would, in an act of artistic miscegenation, be married with the culturally mundane. Elmer Fudd would pursue Bugs Bunny onscreen to the accompaniment of Wagner’s ‘Ride of the Valkyries’.

This departure from traditional European cultural and aesthetic norms was, for outraged European elites, symbolic of the most alarming manifestations of America: its modernity and disrespect for tradition. They feared that in America’s present was Europe’s future writ large. During the nineteenth century, European intellectuals including Tocqueville and Mill represented America as Europe’s future, foreshadowing the arrival of an era of democracy. America was, Alan Levine declared:

the purest expression of what was coming for the world as a whole and Europe in particular ...lacking the entrenched past that impedes the coming of modernity in Europe, America was deemed to be modernity incarnate.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Kroes, ‘Anti-Americanism’, p.210

¹⁰⁸ e.g. see the arguments of Kroes, ‘Anti-Americanism’, p.211-216; Kroes, ‘Anti-Americanism: a Revisit’ in <<http://www.conflicts.ssrc.org/USA/kroes>>; originally published 26 March, 2004, accessed 17 June, 2009; Kroes, ‘America and the European Sense of History’, p.1136; p.1144

¹⁰⁹ Alan Levine, ‘The Idea of America’, unpagged

Much of the antipathy towards America and its culture was an outcry against the remorseless forces of modernisation. However there were those on the left who admired these very forces that they perceived the U.S.A. as embodying in its economy, society and culture. Antonio Gramsci praised American mass production, which functioned as an economic circuit-breaker transforming scarcity and poverty into an affluence available for all consumers, not just an economically privileged few.¹¹⁰ Some interwar German intellectuals also lauded American popular culture for its accessibility, its embrace of technology and its progressive potential. Others deplored what they saw as its envelopment within the folds of capitalist production.¹¹¹ Half a century later Baudrillard described America as the ‘primitive society of the future’, thereby deftly fusing what Alan Levine calls ‘five hundred years of opposite European imagery of America’.¹¹²

IV

A crucial front, both overseas and in New Zealand, in this historiographical battle over the impact of American culture involves the debate over the nature of the response of foreign ‘audiences’ and ‘consumers’ to that culture. The traditional Arnold-Leavis-Frankfurt approach posits a passive, unresisting public. Unable and unwilling to resist the culture being imposed upon them, it becomes overwhelmed by commercial and cultural forces beyond its control. This interpretation has come under attack during recent decades. Its critics focus on the powers of creative negotiation, adaptation and appropriation displayed by the audiences of the recipient societies.¹¹³ They condemn as patronising and elitist the stereotyping of national audiences of American culture as dupes, stupefied by the overwhelming forces of a hegemonic American popular culture. In particular they assert that these publics borrow selectively and creatively from the American cultural repository, ‘assigning their own meanings to products and practices’.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ Peter Taylor, 1999, *Modernities: a Geohistorical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), pp.112-113, cited George McKay, *Circular Breathing: the Cultural Politics of Jazz in Britain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), p.9; Kroes, ‘American Culture in European Metaphors’, p.18;

¹¹¹ Mel van Elteren, *Americanism and Americanization: a Critical History of Domestic and Global Influence* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2006), p.29

¹¹² Baudrillard, *America*, pp.76-77; Levine, ‘Idea of America’, unpagged

¹¹³ e.g. see, John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (Boston: Unwyn Hyman, 1989); Richard Pells, *Not Like Us: How Europeans Have Loved, Hated, and Transformed American Culture Since World War II*, (New York: Basic Books, 1997)

¹¹⁴ Mel van Elteren, ‘Rethinking Americanization Abroad: Towards a Critical Alternative to Prevailing Paradigms’, *Journal of American Culture*, Vol.29 No.3, September, 2006, pp.345-368; van Elteren, ‘Americanism and Americanisation’, p.181. Phillip Schlesinger argues that dominant ideology arguments are flawed by a ‘fallacy of

Whereas the cultural imperialist school insisted that a dominating American popular culture represses and restricts national / local cultures, rendering them homogeneous and superficial, other commentators have maintained that the opposite process occurs. They argued that these cultures, galvanised by the impact of American popular media, in fact become more diverse and more liberated in their attitudes. They become, for example, more accepting of minorities: women, gays, people of colour. They also become, aesthetically, more democratic and less hierarchical, facilitating the erosion of the barrier between high and low culture. Thus the role of the socio-cultural guardians of that palisade, a self-appointed elite, is reduced, even eliminated.¹¹⁵

According to Kroes, the global dissemination of American culture is ‘the story of an American cultural language travelling, and of other people acquiring that language. *What they actually say in it, is a different story altogether*’.¹¹⁶ Recent studies by Elizabeth Vihlen and Masako Notoji focus on the role of the consumers and audiences of ‘popular’ culture, rather than its producers and distributors. They ascribe considerable agency to these receivers, applauding the ‘manifold ways in which people at the receiving end recontextualise American culture as it reaches them’.¹¹⁷ Investigations by Joke Hermes, Reinhold Wagnleitner and Thomas Fuchs of, respectively, Dutch, Austrian and German consumers of American popular culture support such contentions.¹¹⁸ Hermes regards local audiences of American culture as ‘interpretive communities’ –participatory rather than passive, reflective, evaluative, discerning and ironic. She praises the ‘bonding and building’ potentialities of that culture, especially the way they provide a sense of alternate citizenship amongst those who are not in positions of political, economic or social authority. They provide a sense of contribution and an acknowledgement that their opinions have value within their particular communities.¹¹⁹

distribution’. Their dialectic presupposes that ‘distributing the same cultural product leads to an identity of interpretation on the part of those who consume it’. Phillip Schlesinger, ‘Wishful Thinking: Cultural Politics, Medias and Collective Identities in Europe’, *Journal of Communications*, Vol. 43 No. 2 (1993), pp.2-13, cited in van Elteren, ‘Americanism and Americanisation’, p.182

¹¹⁵ van Elteren, ‘Americanism and Americanisation’, p.181

¹¹⁶ My emphasis. Kroes’ aphorism can be found in his article ‘Advertising: the Commodification of American Icons’ in *Trading Culture: GATT, European Cultural Policies and the Transatlantic Market*, ed A, van Hemel and C. Smithuijsen, (Amsterdam: Boekman Foundation, 1996), p.147

¹¹⁷ Kroes, ‘Paradigm’ Section 3,

¹¹⁸ Joke Hermes, *Re-reading Popular Culture* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005); Reinhold Wagnleitner, *Coca-Colonisation*, *passim*

¹¹⁹ e.g. Hermes, *Re-reading*, pp.11-16; 61-71; 155. Hermes also ascribes these positive qualities to examples of local Dutch and other non-American popular culture.

These positive assessments of local reception of American popular culture have been attacked as ‘uncritical cultural populism’.¹²⁰ In particular, they have been condemned for a sentimentalised exaggeration of the creative capacities of cultural consumers to resist and manipulate the cultural products on offer. Such critics argue that these consumers have a limited choice as regards their cultural fare. They are ‘choosing’ from a preselected menu determined by cultural restaurateurs exploiting the tools of modern marketing within the context of American global economic power. Richard Kuisel, for example, warns against exaggerating the adaptive and assimilative powers of the foreign consumers of American cultural goods to indigenize these imports. Assimilation was hardly a means of encouraging cultural diversity; adaptation sometimes meant imitation.¹²¹

During the last decade some cultural historians such as Hermes and Mel van Elteren have adopted a more intermediate position in this debate. Hermes insists that encounters between cultural producers and local audiences involved a constant ‘push and pull ... between manipulation by the [cultural] industry, by dominant ideology, and by a regrouping on the part of those who are being manipulated’.¹²² Van Elteren recommends a balanced perspective that recognises the imperial power and impact of American culture, while acknowledging the receptive agency of foreign consumers / audiences. He believes that consideration must be given to ‘nondiscursive realities’ such as the coercive effects of American technological, economic, and political restraints which limit the range and nature of cultural exchanges, while manoeuvring them towards certain outcomes. Yet he also described as ‘untenable’ the image of American cultural industries as omnipotent, prescient manipulators of cultural goods that defy resistance by foreign consumers. The latter were far from ‘passive, helpless, unknowing, unreflective, all-absorbing’. While there was always cultural space for selection, appropriation and alteration by foreign consumers / audiences, that space, he believes, was constrained.¹²³

V

¹²⁰ Jim McGuigan, *Cultural Populism* (London: Routledge, 1992), cited van Elteren, ‘Rethinking Americanization Abroad’, p.3

¹²¹ Kuisel initially outlined his argument in *Seducing the French: the Dilemma of Americanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); see also his article ‘Debating Americanization: the case of France’ in *Global America?: The Cultural Consequences of Globalization*, eds Ulrich Beck et al, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), pp.95-113, cited van Elteren, ‘Rethinking Americanization Abroad’, p.3; p.7

¹²² Hermes, *Re-Reading*, p.11. She compares this contestation with ‘a huge piece of fabric, pulled in different directions by the many parties involved: producers, advertisers, readers, critics, activists, and legislators. While holding onto the fabric is what binds them, it is also what they fight over’, p.16

¹²³ van Elteren, ‘Rethinking Americanisation Abroad’, pp.6-7

This overview of the historiography of European responses to American culture over three centuries provides a context which enables discussion of how people within a small and geographically isolated south Pacific nation reacted to that culture during a more restricted time-frame. For decades, European scholars focused narrowly on the reactions of European national elites, especially intellectuals. They relied on ideologies and assumptions which prescribed how publics should react to American cultural forms. For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, their assessment of American cultural impact has been negative and derogatory. Yet during this era American culture has been overwhelmingly accepted and even demanded by national populations. This fundamental perceptive dichotomy arises because until recently, few attempts have been made to utilise a much wider perspective, one which considered the opinions and reactions of a much wider range of socio-cultural groups. In short, overseas scholars have started to investigate how and why the public actually responded, rather than be limited by the narrow ideological templates of Marx, Arnold, Leavis, Adorno and others that rigidly delineated how that public was supposed to respond. By focusing on the ways in which ideological mindsets have skewed European perceptions about the reception of American culture, Roger, Ceasar and others have demonstrated the crucial extent to which these responses were mediated through the construction of images and stereotypes of a symbolic America. Such recent research also reveals that viewing 'America' and its culture necessarily involves reflexivity. Commentary on America and its culture reveals vital aspects of our own national and cultural selves. It is the intention of this thesis to investigate the nature and origins of these features, and assess their significance within a mid-twentieth century timespan.

CHAPTER THREE

SINATRA / SONATA: NEW ZEALANDERS' RESPONSES TO AMERICAN MUSIC, c.1942-1956

I

Towards the end of 1942 a traveller on the small Wellington ferry *Cobar* observed his fellow passengers. On this, the vessel's final journey of the day to the city's eastern bays, there were

plenty of girls and young women in picnic garb and some in uniforms, most of the young men in khaki, blue or grey, and a sprinkling of U.S. marines and sailors. Down on the lower deck many couples cuddle on each other's shoulders or otherwise make themselves close and cozy. Soon an accordion is heard, or a mouth-organ; after a few tentative notes a tune emerges and people start singing "There's a Long, Long Trail", "Tipperary", "Maori Marching Song". "The Song of the U.S. Marines" – you hear tunes new and old, and in the intervals the player gives a few bars of swing or "In The Mood".... And war seems far away.¹

This wistful account illustrated some of popular music's many roles: a social relaxant, a setter of moods, a complement to romance. More significant, however, was the passengers' choice of songs. One was identifiably British, one combined indigenous New Zealand origins with a traditional British genre; the others were of distinctively American provenance. The passengers' familiarity with these American songs reveals that the manifestation of America influence in midcentury New Zealand was not only military and strategic, but also musical and cultural. It also displays the richly variegated, evolving nature of the New Zealand public's musical repertoire. This was not the vulgarised and commercialised repository posited by local advocates of 'high' culture. Instead, it drew its material from what Allan Thomas described as a multiplicity of genres and communities: 'Maori songs and Irish ballads, wartime favourites and soldiers' songs, songs from Hollywood and the vaudeville tradition'.²

The American musical presence in New Zealand did not arrive abruptly in 1942. It had been here for generations. When Janet Frame reminisced about her childhood influences

¹ 'Notes and Notions: Last Trip', *NZ Magazine*, March-April 1943, p.29. Some New Zealanders, like a Wellington office-worker, Irene George, kept notebooks containing lyrics of American popular and patriotic songs. Irene George's notebook included various American songs: the 'Army Air Force Song,' the 'Marine Hymn', 'God Bless America' etc. It also contained Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. Irene George Collection, DO 618, New Zealand Film Archives, Wellington. Notebook, Folder 6

² Allan Thomas, *Music is Where You Find It: Music in the Town of Hawera, 1946: an Historical Ethnography* (Wellington: Music Books New Zealand, 2004), p.127

in the late 1920s and the 1930s, she described America as her ‘chosen world’, declaring that ‘[m]uch has been written of the English background to the life of a New Zealander; little has been said of the North American influence.’ Her list of the songs that her family sang at home contained only American tunes – ‘Sidewalks of New York’ ‘Moonlight and Roses’, “‘t ain’t no use sitting on the fence by yourself in the moonlight’, ‘Hallelulia I’m a bum’³. Frame told of how her grandmother

convinced me, by her tales of life in America, and by her knowledge and singing of Negro spirituals, that my ancestral home was North America.⁴

Frame’s poignant acknowledgement of the impact of American music, filtered through the sensibilities of her grandmother, along with the *Cobar* passengers’ repertoire of American songs, exemplify an important but overlooked feature of New Zealand’s twentieth century history. Cultural alliances were shifting during the first six decades of the century, foreshadowing the changing military and strategic affiliations signalled by the presence of American military personnel on the *Cobar*. New Zealand’s default ‘popular’ culture changed during this era: New Zealanders’ cultural loyalties were in a crucial stage of transference from Britain to the United States. C.K. Stead, ten years old when American troops arrived in Auckland, believed that at the time British culture was dominant. Yet he found the American presence culturally transformative.

There was a place called the American Milk Bar in Newmarket, where you could buy new drinks and confections, milk shakes and ice cream sodas, and listen to GIs talking ‘like the movies’, playing jazz, and singing ‘Deep in the heart of Texas’ and ‘New York, New York is a wonderful town.’⁵

Shortly before America entered the second world war, the author and future *Listener* editor Oliver Duff had declared that ‘London is the starting point at present of all our excitements....’⁶ However, the Pacific war and the irruption of American military power into the Dominion meant that for New Zealanders like the young C.K. Stead ‘there was a new kind of excitement’.⁷ Even at the very time Duff was asserting the cultural centrality of Britain for New Zealanders, they were redefining their cultural allegiances, just as their

³ Janet Frame, ‘Beginnings’, *Landfall*, vol.19, no.1 (March 1965), pp.35-6. In 1970, Frame, who had developed contacts and friendships with several major American writers, applied for an immigrant’s visa to the USA. She never completed the formalities. Michael King, *Tread Softly For You Tread On My Life* (Auckland: Cape Catley, 2001), pp.36-7

⁴ Frame, ‘Beginnings’, p.41

⁵ C.K. Stead, *South-West of Eden: a Memoir 1932-1946* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2010), p.8

⁶ Oliver Duff, *New Zealand Now* (Wellington: Dept of Internal Affairs, 1941), p.117

⁷ Stead, *South-West of Eden*, p.16

political and military leaders were re-evaluating our traditional strategic and military alignment with Britain. By 1956 New Zealanders' cultural excitements were increasingly derived from the United States, not the United Kingdom. A radio listener complained in 1950 that 'American culture (?) is replacing English culture to a great extent....'⁸

One of the key demonstrations of this re-alignment was the reception of American popular music by New Zealanders from the 1940s to 1956. During this era the impact of musical genres that were identified as uniquely American in origin – especially jazz, swing, country and western, crooners' ballads, and rock 'n' roll – provoked reactions that provide insights into the ways in which New Zealanders perceived not only American music but American culture and America itself. As archetypically American cultural expressions, U.S. musical genres had served for years before 1942 as a focus for New Zealanders' outlook on a wider cultural world. Although American musical culture evoked a range of reactions amongst New Zealanders, these responses coalesced around essential stabilities of interpretation.

These included the crucial perception that jazz, swing, and rock 'n' roll exemplified America. These genres functioned as metonyms for the United States and its culture. Patrician or plebian, New Zealanders' reactions to this musical culture focused around a set of synecdoches. They used terms such as 'jazz', 'swing', 'jive', 'jitterbug', 'crooning', 'blues' and 'rock 'n' roll' to represent the larger cultural entity that constituted 'America'. When the New Zealand Communist party denounced 'the eroticism, escapism and subjectivism of jazz', it condemned not only the music but also the nation and socio-economic system that produced it.⁹ The simple term 'jazz' encompassed an enormous variety of American music, summarised by a local enthusiast as 'jazz, swing, crooning, boogie or rhythm'.¹⁰ And the arrival of the Marines produced a new metonym. 'The voice of the juke box began to be heard in the land,' Oliver Duff warned New Zealand soldiers overseas.¹¹

American musical forms were closely associated with race and ethnicity. Some New Zealanders identified jazz, swing and rock 'n' roll as African music. Others deplored American music's Jewish influences. For many amongst New Zealand's intellectual and official elites, American popular music epitomised 'low' culture, distinct from, inferior to,

⁸ *Truth*, 27 September 1950, p.19

⁹ 'Jazz – a People's Art Or An Imperialist Weapon', *People's Voice*, April 1954, p.19

¹⁰ *Star-Sun*, 24 May 1948, p.2; George Mackay, *Circular Breathing: the Cultural Politics of Jazz in Britain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), p.9

¹¹ Oliver Duff, *New Zealand Today*, (London: Education and Rehabilitation Service, 1945), p.5

the 'high' European classical music tradition. Some also suspected that American music's perceived democratic and egalitarian ethos was potentially destructive of their perceived roles as cultural invigilators protecting high bourgeois cultural standards in the community. American music also became a marker of national loyalties. Enjoyment of jazz or country or swing was, for some New Zealanders, tantamount to a rejection of the traditional cultural obeisance to 'Home' and Empire. Furthermore, New Zealanders identified American music as representative of modernity, change, and innovation, 'a highway that the world may rush down tomorrow' as the European composer Ernest Ansermet predicted in 1918.¹²

The significance of these various tropes can be best appreciated by considering them within a broader chronological context. New Zealanders' reactions to the musical genres of the U.S.A. were the product of several decades of appropriating and adapting this new global culture. Most of the characteristics of immediate postwar attitudes to American music can be found in the responses of the pre-war decades. Accordingly, they must be seen in deep focus, where the foreground of the attitudes of the 1940s and 1950s becomes more meaningful when set against the background of previous decades.

II

For much of the twentieth century, British music was claimed as the chief source of New Zealand's musical heritage. The 1966 *Encyclopaedia of New Zealand's* introductory article on music in New Zealand declared that the musical tastes of early settlers were characterised by a fondness for 'church music' and the English choral tradition.¹³ However, John Whiteoaks' more recent account emphasises the crucial significance of the trans-Tasman performing arts tradition. '[T]he colonies shared a common British heritage and taste in amateur and musical entertainment', such as music-hall, harmonic societies, Gilbert and Sullivan and brass bands.¹⁴ In 1988 Geoff Lealand drew attention to the importance of the American musical connection. He claimed that 'the popular music of New Zealand, from the nineteenth century onwards, was largely American music.... Tin Pan Alley and the

¹² cited by Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century* (London: Harper, 2009), p.139

¹³ 'MUSIC', from *An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand*, edited by A.H. McLintock, originally published in 1966. Te Ara-The Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, updated 18-Sep-2007 < [http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/1966/M/Music/en.General History](http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/1966/M/Music/en.General%20History) >

¹⁴ John Whiteoak, 'Across the Big Pond: Mapping Early 'Jazz' Activity in New Zealand through Australian Jazz Historiography and Sources' in Richard Hardie and Allan Thomas, eds, *Jazz Aotearoa: Notes Towards a New Zealand History* (Wellington: Steele Roberts, 2009), p.14

Hollywood musical dominated New Zealanders' choices up to the 1950s.¹⁵ Throughout that century and a half, the various genres of American music rapidly gained large audiences.

This American musical influence arrived in the first decades of the nineteenth century, when American and British whaling crews in New Zealand waters shared and swapped tunes and lyrics as well as alcohol during convivial interchanges known as 'gams.'¹⁶ During that century Americans also provided what Gordon Spittle calls 'an orchestra of instruments': fiddles, ukuleles, flutes, and Hawaiian 'Spanish' guitars. In the 1860s miners from the Australian goldfields introduced American tunes such as *The Old Folks At Home* and *Swanee River*, imported from the Californian fields via Australia.¹⁷ Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the 'taro patch slack tuning' technique for guitars – DGDGBD - arrived from Hawaii, and proved especially influential in New Zealand, especially among Maori musicians.¹⁸ Local brass bands, 'the working man's Symphony Orchestra',¹⁹ also used American compositions in their performances, from Civil war regimental staples such as *Aura Lee* to John Philip Sousa's compositions.²⁰ Nineteenth-century New Zealanders also provided enthusiastic audiences for other varieties of

¹⁵ Geoff Lealand, *Foreign Egg In Our Nest* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1988) p.55

¹⁶ Angela Annabell, "New Zealand's Cultural and Economic Development Reflected in Song: Aspects of the New Zealand Folk Song Ethos" (thesis for Ph.D. in Music, University of Auckland, 1975), pp. 11-14, 29-32

¹⁷ Gordon Spittle, *Counting the Beat: a History of New Zealand Song* (Wellington: GP Publications, 1997), p.2. American civil war music was known to New Zealand audiences just a year or so after it appeared in the USA: *Marching Through Georgia* was parodied in Auckland in the late 1860s as *Marching Through Scoria* (a comment on the state of Auckland's roads). Later, 'Bringing in the Sheaves', a favourite hymn of the U.S. revival movement was parodied as 'Bringing in the Thieves'. Annabell, 'Folk Song Ethos', p.146; p.422

¹⁸ Spittle, *Counting the Beat*, p.1, p.9

¹⁹ S.P.Newcomb, *The Music of the People: The Story of the Band Movement in New Zealand* (Christchurch: G.R. Mowat, 1963), Ch.1-2; 'MUSIC', 'General History' An Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, updated 18-Sep-2007 <<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/1966/M/Music/en>> *BRASS BANDS Early Bands* by Maurice Osborne, <<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/1966/M/Music/>> accessed 3 January 2009

²⁰ During the period from the 1860s to the 1920s New Zealanders and Americans shared a fondness for an overlooked genre of popular music, the brass band. The origins and development of this music in New Zealand intriguingly display overlapping British and American influences. Of the fourteen British military units stationed in New Zealand during the 1840s to the 1860s eleven had bands. These established this particular musical tradition in New Zealand. At the same time, the American civil war meant a rapid growth of regimental and brigade bands. Some of the tunes played by these bands – *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, *Home Sweet Home* and *Aura Lee* – rapidly became staples of New Zealand brass band repertoire. Their popularity here paralleled that in the United States; one musicologist describes brass band concerts of the post-bellum era as 'the most important aspect of American musical life'. The American bandmaster and composer, John Philip Sousa, whose 'ever touring band represented America across the globe', toured Australia and New Zealand in 1911, where, according to a biographer, 'the band received what was probably the warmest reception from local musicians.... Audiences were equally enthusiastic'. Sousa even dedicated a new composition, the *Federal*, to his Australasian admirers. S.P. Newcomb, *Challenging Brass: 100 Years of Brass Band Contests in New Zealand 1880-1980* (Christchurch: Powerbass, 1980); Ch.2; MUSIC' from Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, updated 18-Sep-2007; <<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/1966/M/Music/en>> Newcomb, *Challenging Brass* Ch.2; Roger Ruggeri's program notes for Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra; cited on record sleeve notes for *John Philip Sousa Music For Wind Band*, Vol. 6 & 7 (Royal Artillery Band) Naxos 8559247 <<http://www.naxos.com/mainsite/blurbs-reviews>> accessed 8 January 2009; Paul Bierley, *The Incredible Band of John Philip Sousa* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), p.29; Ruggeri; Newcomb, *Challenging Brass*, p.41

American music. A 'Christy's Minstrel' group, which presented a three-act 'blackface' minstrel show featuring Stephen Foster songs, toured the colony as early as 1866.²¹ In 1882 the Fisk Jubilee Singers, a company supposedly consisting of former Southern ex-slaves, toured the colony, performing their repertoire of Negro spirituals and gospel music. By 1900 over 100 black artists were performing on the Australasian circuit, including the Alabama Cake Walkers and the Grand African-American Minstrel Carnival.²²

An even more enthusiastic response to American musical culture occurred during the early decades of the twentieth century, with the arrival of American innovations in popular dance music, that essential feature of American musical production and consumption.²³ As Johan Fornas observes, it was 'historically unique that a set of music and dance styles was so widely used to depict a whole new era'.²⁴ These new American dance modes, utilising ragtime, a new, syncopated, musical form of African-American origin, became the basis of the so-called 'expressive' style that encouraged individual flair, greater activity and freed women dancers from the constraints of long skirts and tight corsets.²⁵ New Zealanders appropriated this American dance music with amazing rapidity. Only a few months after the exhibition of an embryonic form of the Foxtrot dance in New York in 1912, demonstrations of that style were held in Christchurch. Various American performers such as Gene Green, 'Emperor of Ragtime', toured the country, providing lessons on how to play ragtime. During this period the Fullers' Vaudeville Troupe took ragtime to provincial centres like Napier and Wanganui, and country towns like Taihape. In Auckland in 1913, *Kia Ora: the New Zealand Revue* performed local adaptations of current ragtime songs, such as the 'Wanganui Wobble'.²⁶ No sooner had George Cohan's patriotic song 'Over There' become

²¹ Helen Watson, *Music in Christchurch* (M.A. Thesis: University of New Zealand, 1948), p.101. It is not known whether this show was from American Christy minstrel touring circuit or an English-based offshoot of the original that used the same format.

²² Whiteoak, 'Big Pond', p.23

²³ Some aspects of the impact of American dance music are discussed in John Griffiths, 'Popular Culture and Modernity: Dancing in New Zealand Society 1920-1945' in *Journal of Social History*, Vol 41 No.3 (2008), (Expanded Academic ASAP Gale Document Number A 178085330, pp.1-11 The author claims that reactions to interwar dancing 'constituted one of the most notable moral panics in the history of New Zealand', but bases his case on a very limited range of evidence, relying to heavily on the unsubstantiated claims made by the *New Zealand Truth*.

²⁴ Johan Fornas, 'Exclusion, Polarization, Hybridization, Assimilation: Otherness and Modernity in the Swedish Jazz Age' in *Popular Music and Society*, Vol. 33, No.2 (May 2010), p. 19

²⁵ 'Ragtime Dance. Dance Instruction Manuals' Library of Congress Essay <<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/dihtml/diesay7.html>>, accessed 23 January 2009

²⁶ White, Georgia, *Light Fantastic: Dance Floor Courtship in New Zealand* (Auckland: HarperCollins, 2007), p.48. During the later 1890s the RangiRuru private school, which educated the daughters of Canterbury's wealthy families, hired a dance instructor to teach the students new dance styles, which included the American barn dance and the polka, the latter based on central European melodies and popularised in the States. *Star-Sun*, 13 February 1946, p.2, letter from one of the dancers, Mrs V.G. Gibbons, *Star-Sun*, 6 June 1956, p.2 What she claims was a Foxtrot was probably the first, slower, version, known by the less evocative name of 'horsetrot';

tremendously popular in the U.S.A. in late 1917 than its sheet music was available in New Zealand – with alternative verses adapted to the local context.²⁷

Soon New Zealanders were buying not only the sheet music for the new dance ‘crazes’, but also the instructional books of the sort pioneered by the Americans Irene and Vernon Castle.²⁸ Thus people in Winton could learn the words and music to ‘Old Man Jazz’ and ‘Chili Bean’, and the movements for the Turkey Trot and Maxixe a few months after they first appeared on the dance-floors of New York or on the film-sets of Hollywood. Many New Zealand musicians, even those living in small country towns like Opotiki, like Epi Shalfoon, learned the syncopated rhythms from shortwave radio broadcasts from California and Hawaii.²⁹ In the 1920s the current American craze for ukuleles spread here, introducing American melodies such as ‘Little Brown Jug’ and ‘Jingle Bells’. Members of Princess Te Puea’s 1923 concert troupe played ‘American instruments’ – steel guitars, banjos and ukuleles – in their concerts and performed Hawaiian hula, alongside Maori haka and poi items.³⁰ After World War I American-style jazz ‘cabarets’ began business in Auckland and other cities. According to an advertisement for Auckland’s Dixieland Cabaret

No expense, no thought, no pains, have been spared to make Dixieland Cabaret fully worthy of the world’s jazz traditions....

This winter will be one of Glad Jollity ---exuberant joy its keynote!

For Dixieland is more than a happening. It marks a new epoch.

Dixieland ...gives an outlet for this joyous spirit that we have stifled too long....³¹

By the early 1920s many New Zealanders associated jazz with modernity, pleasure and escape. As a vehicle of social enjoyment, it was perceived as marking a contrast with an earlier, sombre period, a means of releasing the pent-up exuberance that had been confined during the war years.

Downes, ‘Fuller, John’ Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, updated 22 June 2007 <<http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>> accessed 1 March 2009

²⁷ David R.S. Dell, *New Zealand Sheet Music Archive: a Bibliography of the New Zealand Sheet Music Archive as at Friday 10th December, 1999*, 3rd ed., (Upper Hutt: David R.S.Dell, 1999), Section 1-71

²⁸ ‘Ragtime Dance. Dance Instruction Manuals’ Library of Congress Essay

<<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/dihtml.diesay7.html>> accessed 26 February 2009

²⁹ In Opotiki, Epi Shalfoon, of Maori-Lebanese descent, used such programmes to teach himself to play such instruments as the piano, saxophone and clarinet. He formed his own band, the Melody Boys, who became a feature of Auckland’s Crystal Palace dance hall from the 1930s until the 1950s. He played ‘rhythm and Blues, Powerhouse Jazz, Dixie....’ Shalfoon died while dancing with his daughter at the Palace. Reo Sheirtcliffe, ‘Dancing in the Dark: a Memoir of Epi Shalfoon’, *Music in New Zealand*, Spring 1990, pp.40-45. Chris Bourke has a well-illustrated section on Shalfoon in *Blue Smoke: the Lost Dawn of New Zealand Popular Music 1918-1964* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2010), pp.61-66

³⁰ Spittle, *Counting the Beat*, p.9; Bourke, *Blue Smoke*, pp.214-222

³¹ Advertisement from *New Zealand Herald*, 6 April 1922, reproduced in Georgia White, *Light Fantastic: Dance Floor Courtship in New Zealand* (Auckland: HarperCollins, 2007), p. 51

Post-1918 enthusiasm for this new musical-dance form was not confined to city sophisticates. Rural, small-town New Zealand ignored the strictures of those moral guardians like Thames Valley's Father Vaughn, who in 1919 blamed jazz for recent 'deplorable tendencies' in women's clothing and also their poor moral values.³² But that region's small towns still held classes teaching 'jazz and all the latest dances' and local bands advertised their prowess with 'the latest jazz, with bells, drums and xylophones [sic]'.³³ By the 1920s Epi Shalfoon's Melody Boys regularly played jazz numbers at dances in small, remote towns in the Bay of Plenty and Poverty Bay.³⁴ In 1921 the small Southland town of Otautau, population approximately 650, held a Tennis Ball which boasted an orchestra 'together with the latest jazz band'. Newspaper notices and social columns reveal that such bands became an established part of rural Southland's social life. The local rugby club, Military Balls and Territorials' annual dances now featured 'jazz orchestras' and 'jazz bands', sometimes replete with xylophones, banjos, saxophone and 'jazzdrums'. Even the Orawia Anglican Church's 1925 concert and dance promised 'jazz effects' amongst the more sedate attractions of the Girls Sunday School choir and recitations.³⁵ A survey of similar newspaper columns across the country demonstrates that the New Zealand public's reception was measured and selective. Jazz music and dances did not replace other forms of public music and dancing. Instead they became grafted onto the existing stock. This was a case of cultural adaptation, not obliteration.

By 1948 five of the six most popular styles of ballroom music were of American origin or adaptation.³⁶ New Zealanders wrote some of these dance melodies, ranging from jazz waltzes to fox trots.³⁷ Other jazz-based American dances had also become popular. 'Swing' numbers arrived, along with a variant, the 'jitterbug', arrived during the thirties, introduced here by a 1934 movie.³⁸ By 1939 several cities and towns had Swing Clubs. The Wellington club held several swing dances that year, 'planned along American lines', but

³² *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 1 April 1919, p.3

³³ *Ohinemuri Gazette*, 11 July, 1921, p.2; 15 August 1921, p.2

³⁴ Sheirtcliffe, 'Dancing in the Dark', pp.40-41

³⁵ *Otautau Standard and Wallace County Chronicle*, 17 May 1921, p.2; 12 September 1922, p.2; 3 April 1923 p.3; 2 April 1927, p.3; 2 September 1925 p.

³⁶ According to the adjudicator at the national ballroom championship. *Star-Sun*, 6 October 1948, p.6. The Christchurch wartime publication *Introductory Guide to Ballroom Dancing* contained instructions for six dances: four were American, including the rumba and tango. Only one, the Palais Glide, was of specifically English origin. *Guide to Ballroom Dancing* (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs Ltd, 1940) unpagged

³⁷ e.g. 'I'm in love with you' (1943); 'I'm going back to Maoriland' 1926?); 'Isabel' (1940?). Dell, *New Zealand Sheet Music Archive*, 1-41; 1-43

³⁸ Cherie Devloitis, *Dancing With Delight: Footprints of the Past Dance and Dancers in Early Twentieth Century Auckland* (Clearwater Cove, Auckland: Polygraphia, 2005), p.275

which included suppers of saveloys and fish and chips as well as demonstrations of new dance steps and swing songs and the club's swing version of *Auld Lang Syne*.³⁹

Swing and jitterbugging became even more popular as a result of performances by American troops during the war.⁴⁰ The first time Geraldine Falconbridge saw it performed was at a dance put on by Marines at Hutt Park. 'They sure could dance.... Quite soon we were up on the dance floor to try it too; anyone with an ounce of rhythm could not exist'. The next day she and two fellow teachers at Hutt Valley High jitterbugged in the staffroom to the delight of other staff. What appealed to Falconbridge and her friends was not just the music's dominant beat, but also the opportunity for improvisation that jitterbugging allowed and the consequent feeling of removal of constraint. 'You made it up as you went along.... you did your own thing; the beat was important. It was fun. It really was'.⁴¹ Lauris Edmond reminisced about a 'dimly-lit den full of American sailors and marines, and weird female creatures dressed in satin and net, all jitterbugging wildly, with a blue smoke haze over everything....I felt deliciously sinful being there'.⁴²

With the withdrawal of American forces from New Zealand in late 1944, attempts were made to eliminate jitterbugging, a key signifier of their presence. During the next months, in Auckland at least, some dance venues banned that dance style. The Peter Pan Cabaret declared 'Jitterbugging is out of date and is absolutely prohibited at this night club'. Other nightclubs followed suit.⁴³ Cherie Devloitis makes a perceptive comment about their motives. Did the dance-hall proprietors really 'hate the jitterbug, or were they trying to encourage the young folk to come down to earth quickly and pick up with the male returned servicemen who could not jitterbug?'⁴⁴ In other words, was American dance music associated by some patriarchal New Zealand minds with young women expressing themselves socially and culturally at a remove from what was perceived as their obligations to their less culturally sophisticated male counterparts? The jitterbug ban can be seen as part of an attempt to restrict women's social and cultural repertoires and to turn back the cultural and social clock.

³⁹ 'Wellington Swing Club', *Evening Post*, 15 May 1939, p.14; 30 May 1939, p.14

⁴⁰ Bourne, *Blue Smoke*, pp.117-126

⁴¹ White, *Light Fantastic*, pp.108-9

⁴² White, *Light Fantastic*, pp.108-9

⁴³ Devloitis, *Dancing With Delight*, p.280

⁴⁴ Devloitis, *Dancing With Delight*, p.280

III

During the final months of the second world war, as American troops were pulled out of New Zealand to be relocated in Pacific bases closer to Japan, a controversy erupted over an unforeseen consequence of that American military withdrawal. Its unlikely source was an Auckland radio station with the call-sign 1ZM. Ironically, just as the U.S. military presence here New Zealand was receding, the argument over 1ZM illustrated the expanding and controversial presence of another, subtler form of American power: the impact of its culture. In the case of the 1ZM controversy, this power assumed the guise of American music as delivered via local radio.

The prewar American musical influence, mediated through New Zealand's National Broadcasting Service, intensified from 1942 to 1944 with the influx of thousands of U.S. troops into Auckland and Wellington. Immediately commercial radio programming changed in order to accommodate the newcomers' musical preferences.⁴⁵ Special sessions, such as *American Hour* were introduced on the commercial ZB stations. These stations broadcast recordings of some popular American radio shows, usually 'variety' and comedy programmes. Although some M.P.s complained about the 'dreadful Yankee noises that were heard over the air', these programmes were listened to 'as much by New Zealand audiences as by the American troops'.⁴⁶ In April 1944 1ZM was handed over to the Americans for a time, becoming the American Expeditionary Broadcasting Station.⁴⁷ 'American 1ZM', as it became known, broadcast American dance music, 'hits' and 'variety' for its listeners, as well as classical music and drama. Its American announcers' informal, relaxed low-key register also contrasted with that of the mandated staid and formal local style. It played requests, encouraged listener response and kept in touch with the community by outside broadcasts. Soon 1ZM became the most popular station in the Auckland region.⁴⁸ However, in December 1944, with the departure of most U.S. troops, the National Broadcasting System resumed control of 1ZB. Immediately, its listeners reacted with dismay and even anger, fearing that the innovations in programming, announcing, and musical content that the Americans had introduced would now be abandoned. One radio reviewer

⁴⁵ Patrick Day, *The Radio Years: a History of Broadcasting in New Zealand*, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1994), p.270

⁴⁶ Day, *Radio Years*, p.270

⁴⁷ Denys Bevan, *United States Forces in New Zealand 1942- 1945* (Alexandra, N.Z.: Macpherson Publishing, 1994), p.359

⁴⁸ Bevan, *United States Forces*, pp.359-60

observed: ‘American IZM has been and gone, leaving behind a great deal of hot opinion. Those who liked it, liked it lots. Those on the other side were just as vehement.’⁴⁹

An aspect of IZM’s American repertoire that was welcomed by local listeners was that, unlike its NZBS counterparts, it offered them the ability to choose what to listen to from its extensive range of music and entertainment. IZM’s programming appealed because its comprehensiveness offered something for everyone.

[I]ts brief tenure showed New Zealand listeners that there are other ways of handling radio stations than those of the National Broadcasting Service.... Lovers of music light and serious, fun and frolic, folk who like to have their stories read to them and those who like to sulk in a corner were all catered for and entertained without any condescension whatever.... [IZM offered] ‘bedlam, mixture, News from all fronts, Beethoven, Bach and Bartok; serials for 12-year old adults; what to grow and what to read; jam, jive and boogie-woogie; what American commentators say; what government thinking says of sadness, of gladness, and madness – the latter, of course, being the swooner Sinatra –pell-mell variety.’⁵⁰

American radio programming was also perceived as giving audiences the music they wanted, unlike New Zealand’s state-run system under the patriarchal supervision of James Shelley.⁵¹ ‘American IZM showed a pleasant preparedness to go to no end of troubles to please you....’⁵² It was this perception of choice and diversity that distinguished the music and presentation of ‘American IZM’ from the limited, bland offerings of the New Zealand broadcasting system. However, listeners to commercial stations could now hear recorded broadcasts of American ‘variety’ shows. These included musicians and performers ranging from Toscanini to Bing Crosby. Their content ranged from Wagnerian opera and Beethoven to big band jazz, negro spirituals, Broadway melodies and Borscht-belt comedy.⁵³ According to the *Standard*, New Zealanders enjoyed the opportunities of selecting from this musical smorgasbord, taking the opportunity to indulge their fondness for an eclectic mix of ‘crooners, Strauss waltzes and light vocals’.⁵⁴ By contrast, the *Star-Sun* maintained, by 1946 local broadcasting had reverted to ‘Radio Boredom’, characterised by a uniformity that amounted to ‘boredom and dullness’.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ *Truth*, 28 February 1945, p.16

⁵⁰ *Newsview*, 1 June 1945, pp. 83-4

⁵¹ Shelley’s crucial role in broadcasting is discussed later in this chapter.

⁵² *Newsview*, 1 June 1945, p. 83

⁵³ e.g. letters in *New Zealand Herald*, 16 January 1945, p.4; 22 January 1945, p.4; *New Zealand Truth*, 28 February 1945, p.16; *Newsview*, 1 June, 1945, p.83

⁵⁴ *Standard*, 17 January 1946, p.10

⁵⁵ ‘Radio Boredom’, *Star-Sun*, 16 September 1946, p.2

IV

At the time of the 1ZM uproar, three New Zealand writers described in revealing detail their attitudes towards jazz and swing. The future dramatist Bruce Mason, wrote ‘Is Swing Folk Music?’ for *Korero*, an armed forces magazine.⁵⁶ The musical journal, *Music Ho!* published an article on swing by A.R.D. Fairburn, one of the wittiest and most provocative of New Zealand’s public intellectuals.⁵⁷ This provoked a reply from an aspiring author, Maurice Duggan,⁵⁸ writing with a German emigre, Werner Droeschner⁵⁹. The trio struck dominant chords which encapsulated postwar attitudes of many New Zealand intellectuals towards American popular music. They also provided insights into elitist attitudes towards New Zealand audiences of that music.

In his article, Fairburn used ‘swing’ as a loose descriptor of jazz and other variants of that American musical genre. His attitude was concisely summarized in the article’s title: ‘Music For Morons’.⁶⁰ Fairburn posited ‘swing’ as the antithesis of culture, an ‘empty and perverse form of music’, its popularity ‘a dreadful comment on the progress of civilisation.... evidence of the decay of sensibility, and the spread of barbarism’. The current acclaim for ‘swing’, Fairburn maintained, was ‘evidence of decadence’ and ‘regression’ in European civilization. Fairburn portrayed this uniquely American music as innately primitive and inferior because of its African origins. Not only had it inherited that continent’s ‘jungle rhythms’; it also evolved from the ‘primitive’ culture of Afro-Americans - the culture of an ‘enslaved and defeated race’.

⁵⁶ Bruce Mason, ‘Is Swing Folk Music?’ *Korero*, 16 July 1945, Vol. 3 No. 12, pp.26-29. Like its 2nd NZEF counterpart, *Cue*, *Korero* occasionally contained articles about American culture for war-service personnel, especially officers, about to return to civilian life.

⁵⁷ This small journal contained musical reviews and articles, mainly about classical music. Its editor and chief contributor was the musically erudite Owen Jensen, who became the *Listener*’s review of new record releases.

⁵⁸ Duggan, born in 1922, was a close friend of Keith Sinclair and the poet Kendrick Smithyman. His literary mentor was Frank Sargeson, although Duggan’s literary style was the antithesis of Sargeson’s. During the 1950s and 1960s Duggan’s literary output ranked him, according to Ian Richards, with Sargeson and Mansfield as ‘one of New Zealand’s greatest short-story writers and literary stylists’. Richards, Ian. ‘Duggan, Maurice Noel 1922 – 1974’. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007, < <http://dnzb.govt.nz> >, accessed 27 February 2009

⁵⁹ Droeschner was a German anarchist who had fought in the Spanish Civil War, and arrived in New Zealand in 1940. He later became a lecturer at Auckland University. He remained an anarchist all his life. At the time of writing the article, Duggan was friends with Droeschner, who copied an upper-class British accent in order to enhance his status as an intellectual. Ian Richards, *To Bed at Noon: the Life and Art of Maurice Duggan* Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1997) p.62; 66; 71. Richards’ account of Duggan’s relationships with other aspiring and self-conscious Auckland intellectuals of the time provides insights into the attitudes and lifestyle of the Auckland ‘North Shore intellectuals’ clique. See pp.60-110 of *To Bed*.

⁶⁰ A.R.D. Fairburn, ‘Music For Morons’, *Music Ho!* June-July 1945, pp. 2-3. All subsequent quotations from Fairburn in this section are from this source.

He also denounced the ‘highly sophisticated sort of “high-brow” swing’ as debased in its ‘obsession with virtuosity’. Swing was bereft of content, preoccupied with ‘slickness’ at the expense of substance.

Aesthetically it is about as valuable as the juggling of ten billiard balls at a time, or the building of ships in bottles.... Its message to the heart is that human life is meaningless except in terms of sensation.

This argument that swing’s virtuosity of technique merely concealed its absence of musical gravamen also appears in Mason’s article. He also insisted that such instrumental expertise ‘points to a lack of content’, which he claimed typified ‘a lack of genuine inspiration’.⁶¹ For both men, music of this type appealed to the senses rather than the mind. Instead of being the repository of moral and intellectual uplift, it merely provided occasions for the exhibition of musical flamboyance.

Fairburn’s analysis of ‘swing’ echoed the mass cultural theorists in assuming a ‘culture of subordination’ that according to John Frow, ‘massifies or commodifies people into the victimized dupes of capitalism’.⁶² Fairburn argued that it was a narcotic, stupefying the populace. ‘Swing has much more the character of a drug than almost any other form of “relaxation”....’ Such music provided ‘neurotic people with a means of mental escape’, but it also conditioned ‘a new generation to the malaise of which it is a symptom, creating in advance, as it were, the condition of neurosis’. Fairburn represented ‘swing’ as the misbegotten musical offspring of sexuality and mass-production, facilitating the enslavement of the masses to their machines. ‘Swing music is a mirror to the craziness of a world in which men have gained enormous power over Nature, and have employed it largely for destructive purposes’. Like Heidegger, he maintained that in the industrial era, the natural world and the individual were subjected to the coercive forces of technology, which homogenized and oppressed ‘authentic’ cultures.

Its crude rhythms have an affinity, not only with sexuality, but also with machinery.... swing music provides to some extent a means of vicarious sexual experience, at the same time helping to keep the victim attuned to the unnatural and machine-ridden world in which he lives.

Duggan and Droescher agreed that swing music was indeed mass-produced, but did not consider that sufficient reason to damn the music.⁶³ Nor did they share to the same extent his concerns about swing’s ‘primitive’ African origins and features, although they

⁶¹ Mason, ‘Is Swing Folk Music?’ *Korero*, Vol. 3 No. 12 (16 July 1945), p.29

⁶² John Frow, ‘Understanding Popular Culture’, in *Reading the Popular* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p.7

⁶³ Werner Droescher and Maurice Duggan, ‘Fairburn’s Bogey’, *Westward Ho!* Jan-Feb 1948, p.11

argued that ‘the negro background of swing music is alien to our [European] taste and traditions’. However, they believed that the original ‘primitive expression’ of African music had been refined through a European musical filter, which proved ‘sufficient to remove it, in some degree, from its pure barbarism’.⁶⁴ In the hands of recent practitioners such as Duke Ellington, jazz had attained a European level of sophistication far removed from its ‘nascent struggles’ in Basin Street. Fairburn, they claimed, failed to realise this. He had overlooked the inventiveness of boogie-woogie’s ‘pitching of the syncopatics against the steady rhythm of the bass’ and ignored swing’s ‘balanced atuning of the various elements of the band....’⁶⁵ Fairburn had also confused swing ‘with the professional wailings of Tin Pan Alley’. That music constituted an inferior form of jazz, its creators sharing only the burden of having been uprooted from their homelands.

If we concede that much of American jazz is written by Jews ... it becomes immediately obvious that the affinity, in creation or expression, is entirely that of the deracine experiencing a common and mutual condition.⁶⁶

Bruce Mason shared these concerns about the authenticity of ‘Jewish’ jazz.⁶⁷ For Mason, jazz in the twentieth century had become ‘far less Negroid than Jewish’.

Both were exiles, though what was relatively recent for the Negroes [sic] was a deeply ingrained pattern for the Jews. After centuries of dispossession from the land, and enforced urban life, they are now the most cosmopolitan of all peoples. Their sophisticated urban melancholy grafted on to the Negro elements in ragtime gives us modern jazz.⁶⁸

Mason deplored what he insisted were ‘Jewish’ influences on jazz. They produced an inferior and effete music, the “sweet school”, characterized by ‘Debussy harmonies, crooners, and ever recurring laments of poverty, depression and lost babies’. However, the second, or “hot” school, which derived its sources from Memphis and New Orleans, had ‘preserved the Negro spirit’. This school reverted to the original folk impulses of jazz, producing ‘remarkable’ music exemplified in the works of Armstrong and Ellington.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Droescher and Duggan, ‘Fairburn’s Bogey’ p.11

⁶⁵ Droescher and Duggan, ‘Fairburn’s Bogey’, p.11

⁶⁶ Droescher and Duggan, ‘Fairburn’s Bogey’, p.12

⁶⁷ Mason, ‘Is Swing Folk Music?’ pp.26-7

⁶⁸ Mason, ‘Is Swing Folk Music?’, p.28. This focus on the Jewish impact on ‘black’ music was a favourite theme of American intellectuals in the 1920s. For example, Isaac Goldberg claimed in 1927 that jazz was the ‘musical amalgamation of the American Negro and the American Jew’. Jazz, he argued, ‘reaches from the black South to the black North, but in between it has been touched by the commercial wand of the Jew.’ Cited Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark: a Cultural History of the Great Depression* (New York: Norton, 2009), p.367; Mary Dupree, ‘Jazz, the Critics, and American Art Music in the 1920s’, in *American Music*, Vol.4, No.3 (Autumn 1986), p.287

⁶⁹ Mason, ‘Swing?’ p.28

Mason was also agitated over an issue whose provenance can be traced back to Herder and other Romantics. He maintained that the original, authentic folk element of jazz had gradually been dissipated over the decades and was now vanishing. Folk music was the music of the ‘common people’, such as the ‘European peasantry ... or the cowboy of the American Middle West in the nineteenth century’. Because such music was spontaneous and uncontaminated by any form of technology, it was ‘completely genuine and sincere’. According to Mason, jazz was the outcome of the union of two folk idioms from two enslaved cultures of the nineteenth century. The rhythmic music of the plantation slaves met the ‘unctuous sorrow’ of Anglo-Saxon church music, which Mason claimed was the melancholy reflection of another form of servitude, the ‘soulless industrialism’ of nineteenth century America and Europe. This early jazz retained its folk purity, and derived from ‘the common [Negro] people.... uncultivated, unlettered, expressing themselves freely, unconsciously, and communally in song’. In Mason’s telling, ‘to a barbaric, twanging, ground bass, the nigger minstrel told of work, play, love and the sun’. ⁷⁰

But twentieth century media destroyed this idyllic folk aspect of early jazz. ‘The decay of the folk-song began as soon as it commercialised’. Records, radio and film meant that jazz was no longer folk music, the genuine article, but ‘popular art music’, an inferior genre. Folk song, Mason insisted, *evolved*; but the acts of recording, filming and even musical notation transfixed and stultified the original; ‘no further growth is possible’. ⁷¹ Swing was merely an enfeebled and exhausted embodiment of a musical species that had once been vigorous but was now bound for extinction. Jazz /swing, having become widely accepted, was bound to vanish anyway: ‘all popular music is short-lived’. Mason had few regrets, for such music was not profound. ‘Serious music will be the specialized enjoyment of a relatively small clique, as poetry is today....’ ⁷²

V

The writings of Mason, Duggan and Fairburn display many of the tropes characteristic of negative New Zealand responses towards ‘jazz’ and ‘swing’, and the American culture from which they originated. But their viewpoints were hardly novel. They reiterated attitudes that had been present in New Zealand - and in the U.S.A. and western

⁷⁰ Mason, ‘Swing?’ p.28

⁷¹ Mason, ‘Swing?’ p.29

⁷² Mason, ‘Swing?’ p.29

Europe - for years. The most significant of these was the association of American culture as the source of the primitive, the barbaric and the black. Jazz and swing, Elizabeth Vihlen observes, were 'inherently connected to blackness'.⁷³ New Zealand opponents of American music repeatedly represented it as evocative of some fearful and primal Other, which endangered the rational and ordered boundaries of the European / British cultural traditions. They also were wary of the emotional, sensual and spontaneous elements of jazz / swing, convinced that it disempowered the civilising forces of reason and intellect.

The enormous popularity of Hollywood musicals that followed the arrival of 'talkies' catalysed 'official' concerns about the impact of black music on New Zealand mores. These musicals often featured black musicians and dancers and black musical genres. This concerned civic guardians. They fretted about the population seeing musical sequences set in 'cabarets', a metonym for nightclubs featuring black artists performing for white audiences. At the end of 1929, the New Zealand Director of Education warned students and their parents at Wellington Girls' College of the pending moral contamination threatened by cinematic depictions of 'New York cabaret life'.⁷⁴ And in 1931 the film censor W.W. Tanner declared

There had been quite a number of pictures coming from America in which negroes and half-caste negroes formed the cast.... He had blocked all of them. The general public did not know what they had been protected from.⁷⁵

Charles Stuart Perry, a longtime member of Wellington's cultural elite, provides a valuable documentation of such unfavorable attitudes towards American music.⁷⁶ His poem 'Jazz' was published in 1934.⁷⁷

Beastly, barbarous shimmering backs
Undulating like savage blacks,
Pouring vile souls into wreaths of metal

⁷³ Elizabeth Vihlen, 'Jammin' on the Champs-Elysee: Jazz, France and the 1950s', in Reinhold Wagnleitner & Elaine Mays, eds, *"Here, There, and Everywhere": The Foreign Politics of American Popular Culture* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000), p.153

⁷⁴ Evening Post, 12 December 1929, Clippings File of W.W. Tanner, IA 83 15 Film Censors Office, Archives New Zealand, Wellington, (ANZ)

⁷⁵ Clippings *Taranaki News*, 13 January 1931; *Christchurch Times*, 12 January 1931: Newspaper Clippings File of W.W. Tanner, ANZ

⁷⁶ Perry, born in 1908, was educated at Christ's College and gained an LL.B. After working as a teacher at private schools in the early 1930s, he eventually worked for the Wellington City library, becoming its chief librarian in 1946. He was a leading figure in the campaign for a national library. He was appointed a founding member of the Indecent Publications Tribunal. McKeon, Brian, 'Perry, Charles Stuart 1908-1982', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007, <URL:<http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>>, accessed 17 August 2010

⁷⁷ Charles Stuart Perry, *Litany of Beauty and Other Verses* (Wellington: Ferguson & Osbon, 1934), p.27. I am grateful to my fellow post-graduate colleague, Helen Bones, for drawing my attention to this poem and providing me with a copy.

Run madly awry, like a crazy kettle:
 And dancing to this, in a foul negro sway
 Are the people who call on these pipers to play,
 And the soul in each is the soul of a child
 Chasing America's youth-run-wild:
 The craze to be modern, the craze to be new
 Is killing the last of the very few
 The few old customs that England had
 That are tossed aside as though they were bad:
 The old barn-dances, the fiddler's play,
 The graceful and stately minuet
 And all for a bang on an old tin can
 And the baby soul of a Yankee man
 Who spews out his filthy rascal noise
 On words that should sicken our girls and boys
 About Silver Linings and Mother-o'-mine
 And Blew-ew-ews (in a horrid whine)
 Since we lap up America's decadence
 God send us a prophet to teach us sense!

Perry's poem encapsulates the essential themes employed by New Zealanders during the next two or three decades in order to condemn such music and also the culture it represented. Jazz symbolised America; both were cognates of decadence. Jazz was also suspect because it was evanescent (a 'craze'), 'modern' and 'new'. He unfavourably compared American popular music, as exemplified by jazz, with its traditional, folk-based English counterpart. For Perry, English music constituted a William Morris romance of 'fiddlers' and 'barn-dances', belonging to a superior, more elegant and tasteful musical culture, as signified by 'the graceful and stately minuet'. Jazz was not music, but mere discordant 'noise' and 'whine'. He used terms like 'savage' and 'barbarous' to associate jazz with the forces of an anti-civilization, explicitly linked with 'blacks' and 'negro[es]'. Jazz embodied savagery and primitiveness. Perry's use of terms such as 'rascal noise', 'foul' and 'sicken' also conflated jazz with delinquency and contamination. His vocabulary of 'baby soul' and 'children' unthinkingly 'lap[ping] up' America's dissolute musical culture also infantilised and belittled jazz's audience.

In the midcentury era, critics of American musical genres still associated them with blackness, inferiority and depravity. Two frequently cited 'sources' for the allegedly primitive and unsophisticated 'Negroid' music were the jungle and the swamp.⁷⁸ An article in the literary journal *Arena /Letters* condemned jazz as 'paganism', an 'instrument in the service of the strange and subversive cults that are furtively feeling their way into our

western civilization today'. The author asserted that swing was an important adjunct to 'degenerate cults' such as 'Voodooism.' The 'tired Europe of the 20th Century' had been insidiously infiltrated by this music.

"Nonsense," says our everyday New Zealander, "what is the harm in a jolly bit of jazz? I can't see anything sinister in the soulful saxophone. Do you really ask me to believe that Duke Ellington is a pagan propagandist?" To which I reply, "Certainly not. But the menace is there all the same. We may see no paganism in what we deem mere harmless amusements, but the onlooker cannot fail to see that in the near future, if the present slump in values continues, the ritual of the Saturday night "Dine and Dance" may not be very far removed from the ritual of the fertility cults."⁷⁹

Disparaging references to the jungle remained a crucial aspect in the postwar lexicon of critics of American music.⁸⁰ A 1955 radio listener condemned jazz and swing for their 'jungle motif, the so-called "Congo" stuff... swiftly degenerating into a rather more bestial type.... Running alongside this swamp strain was the "ragtime" type of music.'⁸¹ 'Jazz, swing and crooning are just jungle noises....' declared another listener, complaining that the performers displayed 'stupid barbarism', their music resembling 'the angry cries of barbarians and apes'.⁸² According to J.S. Lynch, jazz was primordial - 'merely the addition by Americans of other instruments to the drums used by primitive peoples for ages.'⁸³ But other New Zealanders admired the allegedly uncultivated African nature of American music. *Truth's* reviewer enthused over the 'primitive' rhythms of rock 'n' roll music of *Rock Around the Clock*.

There is nothing new about this. The savage with his tom-tom, the dancing dervishes, the Red Indians, the medieval dancers of Colbeck, voodoo and for all I know, the priests and Baal and Stone Age Man all had the same bright idea. The effect is identical. You want to get up and dance.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ 'Jazz and Black Magic', *Arena /Letters*, September 1944, p.11

⁸⁰ e.g. Charles Hale in the *Listener* 29 September 1950, p.5 listed 'barbaric jazz' as one of the 'least desirable of the American [cultural] by-products'.

⁸¹ *Star-Sun*, 13 October 1955 p.2

⁸² *Listener*, 23 March 1945 p.5

⁸³ *Listener*, 26 October 1956 p.5

⁸⁴ *Truth*, 30 October 1956 p.28



Figure 3. By 1947, when the musical *New Orleans* was released here, black performers like Louis Armstrong and Billie Holliday (above) were sometimes dominant figures in the plot as well as providing crucial musical sequences. Note the crowded cabaret style setting and the unashamed association of jazz with the African-American community.⁸⁵ Copyright Majestic Productions Inc. USA.

Linked with accusations that jazz was inherently inferior music because of its African origins, were claims that the genre's 'primitivism' dangerously stimulated its listeners' emotions and coarsened their behaviour. Jazz, like swing, jive, and later, rock 'n' roll, was perceived as what Levine has called 'an *interactive*, participatory music in which the audience played an important role'.⁸⁶ A poem by a youthful Keith Sinclair provides a sense of this emotional interface of music and audience in an Auckland cabaret, while pointing out the music's African roots:

The swirl of skirts and the hectic laughter
The mumbo-jumbo rhythm and the clammy air
Make a dark scene, an African interlude.
The dancers intertwine in the pack tumble
And stamp out an equatorial clatter⁸⁷

⁸⁵ For a sequence showing whites in the film's cabaret audience, go to <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m4jU8IQK5b0>>

⁸⁶ Lawrence Levine, "Jazz and American Culture" in Levine, *The Unpredictable Past: Explorations in American Cultural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 174

⁸⁷ Keith Sinclair, 'Cabaret', *Arena*, No.1 (September 1943), p.4

Many deplored this visceral appeal. ‘Now what effect has jazz on the emotions?’ asked Martha Mason.

The country of its origin tells us of no good record along this line. From its own reports we read of a mounting crime rate, the over-emphasis on and degradation of sex and the young drug addicts.... Jazz with its broken and maddening rhythm (the dance drums of primitive and not so primitive races give an example of stirring up sexual passions), its dissonances, its close harmonies, appeals to the lower emotions. For that reason alone it is bad – it pushes one down instead of raising one up. It is a steady drugging and poisoning of the emotions.⁸⁸

According to another correspondent, jazz was ‘morally debasing and well calculated to make our youngsters grow into effeminate nitwits, if not moral delinquents.’⁸⁹ A Christchurch listener detailed the seductive enticements of jazz concerts in all their dangerously outré trappings.

[G]lamorous youths mutter dirges in low monotones, voluptuous females with grossly seductive gestures moan nasal notes no real musicians can recognize ...sentiment has been turned into sensuous suggestion, romance has been turned into eroticism, song lyrics have become lower and lower until at last they are the dregs of the slimy bottom of the underworld.⁹⁰

Accusations that American music was morally debilitating focused on its perceived sexually explicit content. The *People’s Voice* condemned the songs of Bessie Smith for their ‘eroticism’ and dangerous moral effects on New Zealand youth.⁹¹ The Catholic Women’s League of Lower Hutt’s submission to the 1954 Mazengarb inquiry on youthful ‘immorality’ complained about the offensive lyrics of ‘songs of physical love’. The songs, all American, ‘appeal[ed] to the lowest trait’.⁹² One of the nation’s official cultural guardians, William Yates, the Director of Broadcasting, explained to the inquiry the link between moral decline and delinquency in twentieth century New Zealand and the growing influence of American music. ‘[T]he rot set in, if there was a rot, well before 1930 the beginning of the First World War when musical idioms started to change with the advent of Irving Berlin and Alexander’s Rag-time Band.’⁹³ Yates reassured the public that Broadcasting authorities were diligent in protecting listeners from American music. He instanced his proscription of four songs from the Broadway musical *Kiss Me Kate* as well as

⁸⁸ *Listener*, 26 October 1956, p.5

⁸⁹ *Listener*, 1 July 1955 p.5

⁹⁰ *Star-Sun*, 13 October 1955, p.2

⁹¹ ‘Jazz – a People’s Art or an Imperialist Weapon?’, *People’s Voice*, April 1954, p.19

⁹² Letter from Catholic Women’s League of Lower Hutt to Richard Yates, Director of NZBS, tabled as evidence for Mazengarb inquiry, Yates letter reply 11 June 1954. Folder 06, MS Papers 2384, ATL

⁹³ Folder 02, MS Papers 2384, Papers, X3, ATL

‘hepped up hymns ... hymns in jazz style.... broadcast in America. Our people just banned them right out.’⁹⁴

We can detect here what the sociologist Max Horkheimer described as an ‘ascetic anthropology’, the ‘disapproval of “vulgar” lust’, which he considered characteristic of modern bourgeois thought.⁹⁵ The claims of some New Zealanders to American popular music was a site of immorality and sexual licence, and therefore needed control and censorship supports John Fiske’s contention that popular culture often ‘centers on the body and its sensations rather than on the mind and its sense for the bodily pleasures offer carnivalesque, evasive, liberating practices –they constitute the popular terrain where hegemony is weakest’.⁹⁶

VI

Another type of racism also characterised responses to American music. That music was often linked by its critics with another, more insidious manifestation of the American Other: Jews and Jewish ‘cosmopolitanism’. We have already seen this in the views of Mason and Duggan. For some New Zealanders, the term ‘Tin Pan Alley’ was not only a crucial signifier of the Jewish presence in American culture. This term was used here and overseas as a coded slur for Jewish domination of American popular music.⁹⁷ It also marked the African-American contribution to that culture. Swamp and city, Jew and black; the two Others combined in one crucial metonym. In their repeated demands for its exclusion, regulation or censorship, New Zealand opponents of American music demonised and essentialised it as black jungle music with African roots. Simultaneously, they condemned it

⁹⁴ Folder 02, X3, MS Papers 2384, Papers, ATL

⁹⁵ The quotation is from Horkheimer’s 1936 book *Egoism and the Emancipation Movement*, cited by Kaspar Maase, “A Taste of Honey: Adorno’s Reading of Mass Culture” in John Dean and J-P Gabilliet, eds, *European Reading of American Popular Culture* (Westport, Con: Greenwood Press, 1996), p.203

⁹⁶ John Fiske, *Reading the Popular* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), p.6

⁹⁷ Jeffrey Magee argues that Jewish composers and song-writers ‘dominated Tin Pan Alley and Broadway in the first half of the twentieth century and created the so-called Great Age of American song’. Magee, ‘Irving Berlin’s “Blue Skies”: Ethnic Affiliations and Musical Transformations’, *Musical Quarterly*, (2000), Vol.84, No.4, p.538. According to Jody Rosen, ‘Tin Pan Alley was dominated by Jewish songwriters: that the so-called Great American Songbook, that repository of definitively Yankee Doodle pop music, was largely the creation of composers –Irving Berlin, the Gershwin Brothers, Harold Arlen – just a step or two removed from the Pale of Settlement’. Jody Rosen, ‘Yonkle Doodle Dandy: “Hebrew comedy” sheet music covers from The Lester S. Levy Collection, Johns Hopkins University’ in *Guilt & Pleasure*, #2 Archive, Spring 2006,<
<http://www.guiltandpleasure.com/jewface,>> accessed 19 April 2009

as the industrialised musical product of Jews in the big cities.⁹⁸ It was mocked as primitive and excoriated as modern. Hence the disparaging references to ‘Tin Pan Alley’ in critical discourses on American music from the 1920s to the 1950s. Attacks by New Zealanders on American music as ‘Jewish’ music in the mid-century exhibit the same tropes that Janet Fulcher finds in the discourses of French cultural guardians on so-called ‘nefarious’ Jewish influences on inter-war French musical culture. A key characteristic of both nations’ sets of critiques was the repeated use of racist circumlocutions and coded language. ‘Jewish’ music was represented as the work of rootless ‘foreigners’, ‘aliens’ and ‘outsiders’. Influential sets of French and New Zealand intellectuals derided ‘Jewish’ music as superficial in content but gangrenous in effect, endangering their respective nations’ moral, cultural and social health. Both groups of cultural commentators depicted such music as an invasive cultural force, threatening their respective national cultural heritages. Both demanded the immediate extirpation and proscription of such ‘alien’ music.⁹⁹

In 1947 the *Listener* published an article entitled ‘Tin Pan Alley’ which condemned that location as the malificent source of black and Jewish Otherness. It derisively commented that ‘Nobody cares when the tunesmith pushes a bit from Tchaicowski [sic], a few bars from Nanny Hipstein’s smash hit from yesterday fortnight, a phrase from a negro folk tune and then sign his name to it as an original composition’.¹⁰⁰ A Christchurch listener complained that ‘the people are fed from day to day on the moron suggestiveness that flows in a slimy flood from “Tin-Pan-Alley”, head factory of filth in New York’.¹⁰¹ George Gershwin’s music, not only incorporated Jewish melodic features and blues and black stride piano elements. It also dared to combine them with vocal lines from the European operatic mode.¹⁰² Significantly, Gershwin was especially disfavoured in the highest levels of New Zealand broadcasting: James Shelley, Director of the National Broadcasting System from 1936-1949, banned his music from New Zealand radio.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ This association of jazz with America’s big cities was another favourite theme of American intellectuals in the 1920s. The ‘highbrow’ *Musical America* journal in 1923 dismissed jazz as ‘express[ing] merely the easy joy, insouciance, vulgarity and love of motion characteristic of America’s big cities’. Cited Mary Dupree, “‘Jazz,’ the Critics, and American Art Music in the 1920s”, *American Music*, Vol.4, No.3 (Autumn 1986), pp.287

⁹⁹ Jane Fulcher, ‘The Preparation for Vichy: Anti-Semitism in French Musical Culture between the Two World Wars’ in *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 79, No. 3 (Autumn, 1995), pp. 458-475

¹⁰⁰ ‘Tin Pan Alley’ *Listener*, 10 January, p.12

¹⁰¹ *Star-Sun*, 9 August 1954, p.5

¹⁰² Ross, *Rest is Noise*, p.153, pp.159-161. Gershwin admired Alban Berg, the Modernist Austrian composer, and he incorporated some chordal sections from Berg’s opera *Wozzeck* in *Porgy and Bess*. Ross, *Rest is Noise*, p.161,

¹⁰³ Ian Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1993), p.240.

A revealing compilation of allegations about the ‘Jewish’ element in American music appeared in a 1951 article in *Canta*, the Canterbury University College Students’ Association newspaper. Entitled ‘The World’s Wet Mouth, Lamenting Over Life, the article deplored postwar American ‘hit songs’ as the musical ‘slobberings’ of the ‘cosmopolitan Jews’.¹⁰⁴ These ‘Jewish’ songs were worse than the ‘decadent jungle rhythms of the negroes’ because they displayed that dangerous Jewish element: ‘sophistication’. Black music at least had a ‘primitive vitality’, but Jewish music had ‘that sag so common in Jewish culture....’ The article warned that ‘their music appears to derive a gratification from suffering. It is not healthy’.¹⁰⁵

This perceived Jewish hold over American music echoed other claims about Jewish musical influences that Mason, Duggan and Fairburn had earlier outlined. According to Woods, U.S. hit songs were mere commodities, unlike the folk songs of the pre-industrial era. Then ‘the people as a whole’ had created ‘nearly perfect’ melodies’ such as *Minstrel Boy*. In the machine age there was no longer time for musical creativity or performance by the people. Consequently, the article argued, there emerged a musical bifurcation: ‘high-brow and low-low music’. American Jews were allegedly associated with the latter form, ‘catering successfully for the masses’. But this Jewish’ music endangered the population, for it

seek[s] to provide a drug for the disillusioned slaves of work, to sublimate the repressed sex desire, to stimulate the jagged and deadened nerves, to offer dream Utopias for a war-weary world, to console those frustrated in their sexual purpose....¹⁰⁶

Postwar American songs were also characterised by ‘whimpering’, the product of Jewish ‘melancholy and hopelessness’.¹⁰⁷ They exemplified ‘the worst features we associate with cosmopolitan Jews’.¹⁰⁸ The article praised the compiler of the latest version of the New Zealand University Students’ *Song Book* for making ‘a healthy break from Jewish music’, by ensuring that it contained traditional and ‘healthy’ songs.¹⁰⁹

Canta’s allegations about postwar American music reveal the persistence of crucial tropes ascribed to that musical culture. Many rely on a high / low cultural bifurcation. Its New Zealand audience is implied to be indiscriminating and unaware. The music is

¹⁰⁴ A music graduate, Noel Woods, wrote the article. ‘World’s Wet Mouth’, *Canta*, 20 June, 1951, p.4. The title derives from Graham Greene’s description of organ music in 1930s British cinemas.

¹⁰⁵ ‘World’s Wet Mouth’, *Canta*, 20 June 1951, p.4.

¹⁰⁶ ‘World’s Wet Mouth’, p.4.

¹⁰⁷ ‘World’s Wet Mouth’, p.4.

¹⁰⁸ Noel Woods, ‘Reply’, p.5

¹⁰⁹ ‘World’s Wet Mouth’, p.4.

condemned for being Jewish, effete, cosmopolitan, sophisticated, and an industrialised, commodified product. Not only is it inferior music; its effects are pernicious, for it narcotises the masses and endangers traditional, parochially shared cultures. In this last feature we can detect the fear that Tin Pan Alley was endangering the nation's British cultural heritage.

From the 1920s to the 1950s such opponents of American music agreed with its enthusiastic supporters on one issue: it offered New Zealanders music that was, in a constantly cited word, 'modern'.¹¹⁰ That archetypal American genre, jazz, embodied modernity, change and innovation. For New Zealanders, as for millions in America and beyond, jazz became 'a privileged symbol of this new age'.¹¹¹ George Mackay argues that since the 1920s, jazz and other features of American popular culture, were considered 'synonymous with diversity, innovation and vitality.' He cites Sartre's remark that 'cinema was the art and jazz the music of the future'.¹¹² Jazz's New Zealand supporters delighted in portraying its critics as old-fashioned and precious. 'I can just imagine a group of old men or women, whichever the case may be' envisaged Alan Stewart, writing in 1945, 'crouching over the radio picking yet another fault with the Commercial stations then, after carefully noting a trivial fault, turning back to their beloved YA stations and swooning over So-and-So's Prelude in "Y Minor", Opus 99,999 etc.'¹¹³ Another listener defended jazz on the grounds that it represented 'the post-1914 new ideas of freedom' in style and form. Jazz music was 'alive' in contrast to its stultified classical counterpart.¹¹⁴ Varian J. Wilson, an acerbic Christchurch cultural commentator, claimed jazz was 'the living musical entertainment of the people, in contrast to the dead dogma of a closed-shop union of tinkle-tinkle witch-doctors'. This 'long-haired minority have four YC stations grinding out glutinous gloom continuously'.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ e.g. see *Herald*, 16 January 1945, p.4; *Truth*, 7 February 1945, p.14; 28 February 1945, p.16. Even the language of the nation that produced the lyrics of that music was regarded as the embodiment of modernity; the New Zealand educationalist Q.W. Parkyn observed disapprovingly that he met some Czechoslovakian students 'learning American. Not English, mind you, but American.... When I asked them why, they said ...America was the country of the future and so American was the language to learn.' *Listener*, 29 October 1948, p.7

¹¹¹ Fornas, 'Exclusion, Polarization', p.219

¹¹² Mackay, *Circular Breathing*, p. 69; p.9

¹¹³ *Listener*, 27 July 1945, p.6

¹¹⁴ *Listener*, 21 September 1956, p.5

¹¹⁵ *Listener*, 11 November 1956, p.5

VII

A few weeks before V-J Day, *Newsview* magazine praised the ‘gaiety and abandonment’ that it claimed characterized American radio musical programming. The British-style local equivalent offered ‘good form and superior taste’, but the American format was preferable to British cultural snobbery. *Newsview* warned ‘[i]f our tastes are low, let us grow in discrimination. Don’t attempt to dictate us into good form and superior taste.’¹¹⁶ Listening to the music of Art Tatum or Gene Autry hardly constituted a rejection of Britain. However, for some it was troubling evidence of local willingness to adopt the cultural products of Britain’s replacement as New Zealand’s protector in the south Pacific. The ubiquity and popularity of American music made it obvious that postwar New Zealand was no longer tied to a Motherland by the British cultural tradition. This provoked some to insist that the preservation of the nation’s British heritage and imperial links required the proscription of American music. ‘There is sufficient good English, Scottish, Irish, and Welsh music, and other European music to fill our programme’, claimed a Christchurch listener in 1948, ‘and if we wish our children to be musical we should prohibit this American substitute for music’.¹¹⁷ Another correspondent, ‘Stay British’, provided a concise compendium of certain attitudes towards American music.

[W]e are flooded with sickly sentiment, “crooned,” as the late head master of Eton said, “by emasculated gentry from across the Atlantic.” The songwriters of that country seem to have the vocabulary of a half-wit. Never before have Britishers tolerated such tripe, but a generation has grown up which accepts, and actually likes it, to the extent that the great heritage of our speech, redolent of Shakespeare and the Bible, is threatened Hawaiian guitars with their cloying, sickly stuff, hillbillies and the tuneless, syncopated, broken-time dance music by persons who have the effrontery to call themselves pianists. Perhaps a new Government will insist on a standard more suited to a British community.¹¹⁸

The writer feared that New Zealanders, inundated by the ‘flood’ of American culture, no longer regarded themselves as British. Even the pseudonym ‘Stay British’ emphasises this point. The intrusive, alien culture, represented by its ‘tripe’ of Hawaiian guitars, hillbillies, dance music, was now not only tolerated, but actually enjoyed within the Dominion, thus endangering the dominance of the British cultural heritage. American music was characterised as sentimental. Its singers were denigrated as ‘emasculated’, thereby linking American culture with effeminacy or homosexuality. Once again, the government was called

¹¹⁶ *Newsview*, July 1945, p.88

¹¹⁷ *Star-Sun*, 14 June 1948, p.2

¹¹⁸ *Star-Sun*, 14 October 1946, p.2

on to regulate the cultural relationship.¹¹⁹ The letter resulted in the newspaper printing a special column of replies. Most rejected the writer's claims about the superiority of British cultural values. Instead, they called for a more tolerant and inclusive attitude to American music: after all, 'one man's sonata is another man's Sinatra.'¹²⁰ One, with the revealing pseudonym 'Just a New Zealander', declared

I can assure "Stay British" that the 'cloying, sickly stuff of Hawaiian guitars, hillbillies and tuneless, syncopated, broken-time dance music' was more appreciated by the average New Zealand fighting man than that kind of staid, sombre, saddening stuff, so cherished by drab followers of Shakespeare.¹²¹

For such New Zealanders, British musical culture was dull, snobbish and focused on the past, an implicit contrast to a livelier, fresher and innovative American music that was now more relevant to most New Zealand tastes.

VIII

The reference to Shakespeare shows that in the 1950s many still associated American culture with 'low' culture, while British culture was inextricably linked with 'high' culture. This was the viewpoint of the managerial elite of the National Broadcasting System (N.B.S.). Since 1936 they encouraged the development of musical and other radio programming along the lines of the B.B.C with its stern, paternalistic emphasis on 'high' culture as the instrument for the moral and cultural improvement of the citizenry. Such was the philosophy of John Reith, the B.B.C.'s founding Director-general. James Shelley, a former British educationalist and academic and Reith's equivalent in the N.B.S., emulated Reith's approach. Shelley had previously spent several contentious years as Professor of Education at Canterbury University College. Although he was a severe critic of New Zealand educational methods and teaching standards, he disdained actually visiting schools to see for himself what was happening.¹²² Having gained prominence and a coterie of female admirers in the Christchurch musical and dramatic scenes, Shelley became the founding

¹¹⁹ *Star-Sun*, 14 October 1946, p.2

¹²⁰ 'Varied Views on N.Z. Radio Programmes', *Star-Sun*, 22 October 1946, p.2

¹²¹ *Star-Sun*, 22 October 1946, p.2

¹²² C.E. Beeby, *The Biography of an Idea: Beeby on Education* (Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research), 1992, p.48. Beeby was a colleague of Shelley's in the Education department at Canterbury University College. He later served as Director of Education 1940-1960. Renwick, William. 'Beeby, Clarence Edward 1902 - 1998'. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007 <<http://www.dnzb.govt.nz/>> accessed 17 June 2010

director of the N.B.S., established by the Labour government in 1936.¹²³ He was one of the most significant of cultural guardians of the thirties and forties who protected the ‘high’ British musical cultural tradition against the newer American-dominated popular genres.

As a colleague observed, Shelley was ‘a Platonist who believed in rule by a few wise men....’¹²⁴ Like W.J. Scott in the field of literature, and Gordon Mirams in film criticism, Shelley maintained that inculcation of correct cultural values was an essential part of public education.¹²⁵ Like Reith, he detested commercial broadcasting and popular music, but loved the cultural and social cachet offered by classical music. During the



Figure 4. Shelley, second row, peering between two society matrons at a meeting of the Society For Imperial Culture, (Christchurch Branch), mid-1930s. High culture as British culture and cultural preferences as markers of social status.¹²⁶

¹²³ Shelley’s background is revealing and has been extensively documented in Ian Carter’s biography. Born in England in 1883 and graduating from Cambridge, he taught for one year before taking up posts at training colleges and the University of Manchester. After war service he took up the new chair of education at Canterbury University College, aiming to revitalise schooling through reformed teacher education. Frustrated in his wish to emphasise cultural training of teachers rather than their professional training, Shelley became a lively and controversial figure in the Christchurch arts scene, especially drama and art. In 1936 the new Labour government offered him the new post of Director of Broadcasting. See Ian Carter, *Gadfly: The Life and Times of James Shelley* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1993); Carter, ‘Shelley, James 1884 – 1961’. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007. < <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz>>; Beeby, *Biography*, pp.46-8

¹²⁴ Beeby, *Biography*, p.290

¹²⁵ Hence his insistence that the B.A. Education paper at the Canterbury University College should be cultural, not professional. ‘It is impossible for a student to judge of the value of educational processes unless he has a fair grasp of the basic elements of culture’. Shelley, Outline of a Scheme for the establishment of a School of Education at Canterbury College, 4 October 1920, cited in Carter, *Gadfly*, p.90

¹²⁶ Photo source unknown, reproduced in Carter, *Gadfly*, pp.240-241

twenties and thirties he was President of the Society for Imperial Culture (Christchurch Branch), a group which, in his biographer's words 'connected skilled but poor performers with rich but stupid audiences'.¹²⁷ Its members, Christchurch's social elite with cultural pretensions, attended performances in evening dress and stoles. Shelley, in his influential role as Director of Broadcasting and supported by several of his former Christchurch W.E.A. students now in Cabinet, along with his political mentors Peter Fraser and Walter Nash, wanted New Zealand musical broadcasting culture to be high and British, not low and American.¹²⁸ As Ian Carter notes, Shelley

never entertained a doubt about the dominion's umbilicus to a nurturing Home. At Broadcasting he insisted on the English language being spoken with an English accent. England was the metropolitan centre, New Zealand the provincial periphery. Like convicts, culture was to be transported from the former to the latter, there to make the best of local circumstances.... For Shelley to defer to Home was to acknowledge to highest cultural authority.¹²⁹

His insistence that 'good' music was classical music and his identification of that music with British culture became clear during his chairmanship of the 1940 Centennial Music Celebrations. Under the watchful supervision of Peter Fraser, Shelley ensured that the Centennial's music would be of the 'high' cultural variety. The celebrations, he reassured Fraser, would involve

the established Musical Societies, who, throughout New Zealand's history, have done such magnificent and effective work in developing and keeping alive that appreciation of good music which is so essential to the cultural development of the people of any country.¹³⁰

To provide the requisite English musical polish to this antipodean musical veneer, the government would import from England 'a Musical Adviser and a sufficient number of outstanding soloists'. This would, he proclaimed, 'result in a sumptuous feast of good music never before set before New Zealand music lovers'.¹³¹

Shelley's term as Director from 1936 to 1949 was marked by his conviction that in the 'proper' hands, radio could be used to mould public thinking and attitudes in 'correct' cultural and ideological directions. Under his guidance, state radio broadcasting became

¹²⁷ Carter, *Gadfly*, p.192; Carter, 'Shelley', *DNZB*

¹²⁸ Carter, 'Shelley, James 1884 – 1961', *DNZB*

¹²⁹ Carter, *Gadfly*, p.274

¹³⁰ James Shelley, letter to J.T. Waugh, Private Secretary, Prime Minister's Office, AADL564 box 87b 1/9/19, ANZ

¹³¹ Shelley to Waugh

New Zealand's 'principal cultural patron'.¹³² Some New Zealanders of similar cultural persuasion held high hopes that Shelley would be successful in the Herculean labour of improving ordinary New Zealanders' cultural quotient.

The average man's tastes are decidedly below par, and Professor Shelley has, no doubt, made up his mind to elevate, or at least endeavour to elevate this taste. His task will be a bitter one.... He should know that jazz, boxing, wrestling, horse racing results, and punch and judy shows are the life blood of the multitude; cultural information – lectures on Greek ideas – receive scant consideration.¹³³

Before taking up his post, Shelley declared both the cultural intent behind his broadcasting vision, and his view of the New Zealand public. 'There was once a wicked lady called Circe' he told the Christchurch Rotary Club, 'who was reputed to turn human beings into swine. The object of broadcasting should be the exact opposite....' He warned that '[A]ny doubtful qualities that may exist in New Zealand citizens will be expelled'.¹³⁴ The radio for Shelley, was what the theatre was for France's Jacobins – the nation's cultural and political classroom.¹³⁵ In 1936 he told Christchurch teachers that

[I]f the New Zealand public really wants vaudeville, it is not the slightest use appointing me Director of Broadcasting. I am not thinking of what the casual listener wants to hear in 1936. I am thinking of what they will be having in 1946. Are we going to use such a tremendous instrument [radio] ... as a background for the noises we make when we eat our soup? Anyone who uses it in that manner is a traitor to his country. Is the attitude of the person who wants to use the radio for vaudeville the right attitude for a citizen? There is no reason why people should not get as much enjoyment out of their radios as they get at present. They can have what they want, but they must have the best, so in time they will be wanting something they did not want yesterday.¹³⁶

These statements are revealing. By using the American term 'vaudeville',¹³⁷ rather than its English equivalent, 'music-hall', Shelley linked the wider New Zealand radio audience with that particular form of American entertainment.¹³⁸ During first half of the

¹³² Carter, 'Shelley, James 1884 – 1961', *DNZB*

¹³³ *Tomorrow*, 16 February 1938, p.225, cited in Carter, *Gadfly*, p.234

¹³⁴ Bert Hall, *The History of Broadcasting in New Zealand 1920 – 1954* (Wellington: Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand), 1980), p.88

¹³⁵ See James Johnson, *Listening in Paris: a Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p.100

¹³⁶ Hall, *History of Broadcasting* p.87

¹³⁷ There is a rich source of information on the etymology and provenance of vaudeville as a specifically American form of nineteenth and early twentieth century popular culture.. The most interesting account is Alan Trachtenburg's *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982). Lawrence Levine also has a valuable discussion of vaudeville's social and cultural implications in *Highbrow / Lowbrow: the Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1988). A useful academic website is 'Vaudeville', <<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA02/easton/vaudeville/vaudevillmain.html>>, accessed 20 June 2010

¹³⁸ Shelley's views on culture were sometimes the subject of derision. Thus *Radio Record* published a mocking account about labourers building a 'Temple of Plastic Art' going on strike because management refused to play

twentieth century, New Zealand cultural guardians used ‘vaudeville’ as code for vulgarity and shoddiness. Shelley wanted state media to ‘improve’ the public’s cultural preferences. In a 1946 radio talk he declared that radio ‘could do the work of conditioning the mind of the ordinary citizen’.¹³⁹ Shelley envisaged the state as an instrument of cultural cleansing, the agent for ‘expelling’ New Zealanders’ ‘doubtful qualities’. It would transform the New Zealand public into culturally acceptable citizens. His ingenuous claim that ‘[t]hey can have what they want, but they must have the best,’ in practice meant that what constituted the ‘best’ would be decided by him, not the public. Although he declared in 1947 that ‘[a]ll tastes should be catered for’, his broadcasting policy remained one of ensuring that these tastes must first undergo cultural rectification. Scott had the patriarchal ideology of the British colonial administrator, implementing policies that will ultimately eliminate the heathenish ways of the native inhabitants, eventually transforming them into a civilised (British) species with the correct cultural values. To achieve this, the actual preferences of the populace at large must be ignored if they are considered harmful and inappropriate. His policy was the opposite of radio ‘American 1ZM’ during its brief but popular tenure. Its listeners perceived the station as offering them a musical smorgasbord from which they could select; Shelley offered a meagre fixed menu presumably made more palatable by its alleged cultural and civic nutritional value.

Those like Shelley who deplored American musical culture did so for assumptions understandable to Matthew Arnold or F.R. Leavis. That culture was certainly not ‘good’ culture. Lawrence Levine has pointed out the disconnect between ‘Jazz’, that recognizably uniquely American music, and ‘Culture’. Culture embodied order, intellect, harmony and structure, whereas jazz was discordant, emotive, improvisational and unpredictable. The audiences for music of ‘Culture’ essentially had a passive role; jazz was often played surrounded by noisy, dancing, audiences.¹⁴⁰ The improvisational nature of jazz implied that musical perfection was impossible and that instinctive understanding was more important than formal musical knowledge. Jazz and other varieties of American music lacked the imprimatur of what Andrew Ross calls the ‘cultural accreditation’ possessed by European

Bach over loudspeakers. ‘Yes, sympathetic reader, you and I and, I pray, Professor Shelley himself will live to see the days... when items such as these will be recorded in our daily Press. This fair island of ours will be so steeped in culture that when we perspire the beads of moisture will rise on our skin in Greek-key pattern’.

Radio Record, May 1937, p.68, cited in Carter, *Gadfly*, p.234

¹³⁹ ‘Broadcasting in the Service of Peace’, *Listener*, 4 October 1946, pp.7-9; also Carter, *Gadfly*, p.244

¹⁴⁰ Levine, ‘Jazz and American Culture’ pp. 172-188, esp.pp.173-4

high culture.¹⁴¹ Nor did they incorporate characteristic features of high musical culture: long preparation and training, a tradition of connoisseurship, an accepted canon of form, style and structure, and complexity of artifact.¹⁴² For one *Listener* correspondent jazz was

stuff that appeals to minds that are immature as far as aesthetic training and educated discrimination are concerned. Successful composers of good music ... must go through a course of disciplined training. But jazz composing is relatively easy (much of it cribbed, with appalling mutilations appropriate to the purpose) and what is more, it is easier to sell, because there are far more people lacking in a cultivated musical taste (a process calling for some time and trouble).¹⁴³

In this mindset, ‘good’ music emanated from the European salon, jazz from the American saloon. Jazz’s very accessibility and perceived simplicity and ease condemned the genre. Whereas the absence of tradition was taken as proof of ignorance on the part of critics of jazz and swing, for fans of such music that very absence meant a liberating freedom.¹⁴⁴

The musical DNA of such American genres as jazz was derived from African, not European codes. African-derived music was essentially pentatonic, European diatonic. Blues, jazz and rock ‘n’ roll also appropriated other African musical features, such as a strong repeated beat, distortion of instrumental timbre, and use of improvisation and variation, and crucially, the blurring of distinction between verbal and non-verbal sound.¹⁴⁵ All these non-European musical features helps explain why so many of the negative reactions to jazz and swing focused on their ‘conglomeration of discordant sounds’, ‘horrible, discordant sounds’.¹⁴⁶ One disgruntled critic maintained that ‘very little jazz has so far shown true artistic perception of beauty ... whatever it is we cannot claim that is music’.¹⁴⁷ American music was also dismissed as evanescent rather than eternal, lacking the moral and intellectual resonance of classical music. In 1951 the New Zealand Library Association urged that public libraries not stock records or scores that constituted part of ‘a vast mass of ephemeral material that should be ignored: here today and gone tomorrow

¹⁴¹ Andrew Ross, *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p.63

¹⁴² James Gilbert, ‘Mass Culture and the Romance of American Pluralism’ in Rob Kroes, Robert Rydell *et al*, eds, *Cultural Transmissions: American Mass Culture in Europe* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1993), p.25

¹⁴³ *Listener*, 22 April 1955, p.23

¹⁴⁴ I have freely adapted Alex Ross’s argument in *The Rest is Noise*, p.134

¹⁴⁵ Paul Oliver *et al*, *The New Grove Gospel, Blues and Jazz* (New York: W.H. Norton, 1986), pp.6-13; 39-44; 235-237; Paul Oliver *et al*, *Yonder Come the Blues: the Evolution of a Genre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.11-13; 20-37; 308-329; Ted Gioia, *Delta Blues: the Life and Times of the Mississippi Masters Who Revolutionized American Music* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008); pp.4-10; Peter Hall, *Cities in Civilization: Culture, Innovation, and Urban Order* (London: Phoenix Giant, 1999), pp.561-3; Ross, *The Rest is Noise*, Ch.4, ‘Invisible Men’; Leonard Bernstein, ‘The Absorption of Black Elements into American Music’, cited in Ross, *Rest is Noise*, p.132; Morris Dickstein, *Dancing in the Dark: a Cultural History of the Great Depression* (New York: Norton: 2009), pp.360-367; Chapters 12 and 13

¹⁴⁶ *Star-Sun*, 1 July 1948, p.2; *Listener*, 5 October 1956, p. 5

¹⁴⁷ *Listener*, 5 October 1956, p. 5

dance music and song hits'. Librarians were told that 'selection should be limited to classical music'.¹⁴⁸

Other cultural gatekeepers insisted that classical music required protection from contamination by American media. In 1952 Gordon Mirams outlined his objections to the utilisation of classical music in American films. He cited the musical *Seven Boys Ashore* shown at a local Children's Cinema Club, and featuring 'swing music and jitterbugging'. Mirams deplored that the film 'emphasised [this music] as preferable to Bach, Beethoven & Mendelsshon [sic]. He professed horror at a cartoon in which

an orchestra is shown boring an audience of animals with classical music, and then when converted by a monkey into a swing band, rousing them to dancing and delight; the monkey is borne home in triumph. Such pictures can only make the school's task of encouraging the appreciation of good music more difficult.¹⁴⁹

Again, we find the association of the popular and the American with the juvenile and the inferior. Mirams' demarcation of music into the good and the bad was reinforced by his insistence that swing and jitterbugging resulted in the 'cultivation of a taste for what is culturally shoddy; this is sometimes reinforced by a deliberate belittling of the culturally superior'.¹⁵⁰

Thus American music had a fundamental aesthetic flaw in the eyes of cultural conservatives like Mirams. It did not respect the cultural boundaries that presumably once separated classical music of the past from popular music of the present. These critics bitterly deplored one of the distinctive features of twentieth century American music: bricolage. This enthusiasm for appropriating and adapting swathes and samples of musical motifs, chords and melodies from a range of musical genres produced music that was new and different. The musicologist Alex Ross maintains that twentieth century American music was distinctive in the way 'it mixed cultures – and genres – in a creatively indiscriminate way'.¹⁵¹ For example, Jerome Kern's 1927 musical *Showboat*, which featured several melodies that became New Zealand sheet-music staples of the 1930s and 1940s, was a montage of American and European musical styles. *Showboat* appropriated chords from Verdi and Puccini, and mingled them with 'banjo strummings, Gilbert and Sullivan ditties,

¹⁴⁸ *New Zealand Libraries*, Vol.13, no.7 (August 1951), p.166, p.173

¹⁴⁹ Actually *Seven Days Ashore*

¹⁵⁰ Memo for Assistant Secretary of Internal Affairs, 19 August, 1952, from Gordon Mirams Censor of Cinematograph Films, IA 83 15 Film Censors Office, ANZ

¹⁵¹ Ross, *Rest is Noise*, p.153

Sousa marches, vaudeville patter, Hoochie-Coochie music....' Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* mixed western European, African-American and Russian-Jewish elements.¹⁵²

Such musical miscegenation appalled those New Zealanders who insisted that there must be a cultural barrier between 'good' music and the 'inferior' variety from America.

K.F. Tucker maintained swing

defiles what it touches. In itself it is both wicked and sterile.... It shamelessly steals the tunes of the great classic composers and then disfigures and dirties them.... attractive and immortal melodies are found to have been debased and uglified beyond endurance....¹⁵³



Figure 5. Poster: 'Murder at the Vanities'. Copyright Paramount Pictures Inc. Black music and musicians appropriate classical music and replace the white music, musicians and showgirls.

Hollywood musicals frequently integrated elements of classical music with jazz and Broadway tunes, sometimes ironically as in 1934's *Murder at the Vanities*, the finale of which features a classical orchestra being replaced by Duke Ellington's band, who gradually

¹⁵² Ross, *The Rest is Noise*, p.154; 162

¹⁵³ *Listener*, 5 August 1955, p.5

meld Liszt's 'Hungarian Rhapsody' into Ellington's jazz composition, 'Ebony Rhapsody'.¹⁵⁴ Those New Zealanders who objected to this cultural sacrilege would have been equally outraged by the movie's depiction of the white orchestra and its music playing Liszt giving way to a black band gradually appropriating the melody: 'It's got those licks, its got those tricks / That Mr. Liszt would never recognize / It's got that beat, that tropic heat'.¹⁵⁵ Appropriations like this caused some listeners to complain of swing that 'beautiful music like that of Chopin and others is taken to pieces, and "swung" with alterations of tempo and the addition or deletion of notes everywhere.'¹⁵⁶ During the forties and fifties, Hollywood musicals, tremendously popular in New Zealand at this time, continued to offend the nation's patrons of 'legitimate' musical culture, for they increasingly juxtaposed black music and performers with classical music, portraying both as valid and valuable.¹⁵⁷

Such objections to those essential American cultural features of irreverence, irony and appropriation exemplify Pierre Bourdieu's argument that '[t]he most intolerable thing for those who regard themselves as the possessors of legitimate culture is the sacrilegious reuniting of tastes which taste dictates shall be separate'.¹⁵⁸ Some postwar New Zealanders not only dismissed American music as a form of musical culture; they regarded it as the destructive enemy of true culture. Its popularity meant that '[a] new age is dawning which will be devoid of the cultural influences we have known. It is likely that before long the process of artistic creation will be in a situation parallel to that in the centuries following the collapse of Greek civilization.'¹⁵⁹ In order to avert the danger of civilised listeners being contaminated by these barbaric sounds, some cultural critics advocated aural segregation.

¹⁵⁴ Click this link < <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CaZNxl7dBoc> > to play sequence

¹⁵⁵ 'Ellington Recording Sessions Schedules: 26 February 1934', <<http://www.depanorama.net/34.htm>>; Alan Vanneman, 'Review: Murder at the Vanities', *Bright Lights Film Journal* <<http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/26/vanities.php>>, accessed 3 December 2010

The movie's poster hints subtly indicates this racial aspect. It is dominated by the white cast and white chorus line but Ellington is listed as one of the stars and the ethnicity of his band is indicated in the lower swathe of the poster. Andrew Ross, Audio Guide, < <http://www.therestisnoise.com/2008/05/chapter-1-listen-to-this.html> >; Ross, *Listen to This*, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2010), p.16; 'Murder at the Vanities', < <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0025529> >, accessed 3 December 2010

¹⁵⁶ *Star-Sun*, 7 October 1946, p.2

¹⁵⁷ In *New Orleans* (1946) Billie Holiday takes her rich white opera singer employer to a Storyville jazz club to hear –and enjoy – black artists. The opera singer finds the inter-racial audience includes her opera coach, who has come to hear Louis Armstrong. In the 1948 *A Song is Born*, an avuncular, wise Louis Armstrong guides classical music scholars to a realization that jazz is just as much a part of the musical fabric as Brahms and Mozart. Ten years later, in Cole Porter's musical *High Society*, Armstrong and his band have a crucial function, not only as musicians but also as narrator and chorus, commenting on the action as the plot proceeds. Michael Meckna, 'Louis Armstrong in the Movies, 1931–1969', *Popular Music and Society*, Vol.29, No. 3 (July 2006), pp.359-366

¹⁵⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, (New York and London: Routledge, 2009), pp.56-7

¹⁵⁹ *Listener*, 5 October 1956, p. 5

The former Labour M.P. Ormond Wilson wrote a book explaining the advantages of having radio stations specialising in different types of music and entertainment for different types of listeners, thus preventing the classical elite from inadvertently hearing jazz or swing.¹⁶⁰ As one listener demanded: ‘rigidly separated stations according to different levels of taste’.¹⁶¹

IX

Cultural conservatives on both left and right shared this concept of a rigid hierarchy of musical taste after 1945. It imbued the attitudes of those as politically diverse as the communist Elsie Locke and the conservative, pro-business *New Zealand National Review*. Locke believed that New Zealand housewives must be weaned off their vulgar musical tastes, and their cultural diet fortified by broadcasting what she called ‘good music’ – and for Locke, that meant classical music.¹⁶² The *National Review* deplored the musical tastes of the ‘listening public’, suggesting that it should ‘listen selectively’ and eschew American popular music in favour of classical.¹⁶³ The New Zealand Education and Rehabilitation Service’s articles about music, written for New Zealand service personnel overseas, were underwritten by similar assumptions. NZERS believed the public required guidance in order to abandon its unfortunate preference for the lower musical forms. ‘[U]nless more [New Zealanders] ... interest themselves in good music, the future of this fair art is liable to be devoted to a glorification of imported dance music....’¹⁶⁴ For cultural conservatives jazz or swing was music for those lacking cultural taste and intelligence. ‘We shall always have our musical *aphides* ... secreting their sickly honey-dew for the edification of those who have not cultivated good taste....’ declared one listener.¹⁶⁵ From this perspective, classical music appealed to ‘[o]nly the true music-lovers, who are a relatively small proportion of the population’.¹⁶⁶ Mason and Fairburn believed that culture in general, and ‘good’ music in particular, could not derive from, or be appreciated by, the many.¹⁶⁷ In praising the canon of high culture, such people emulated the critical and aesthetic ideology that, according to

¹⁶⁰ Ormond Wilson, *What’s Wrong With Broadcasting? A Plan For Radio in New Zealand* (Auckland: Paul’s Book Arcade, 1946)

¹⁶¹ Listener, 31 April 1956, p. 5

¹⁶² *People’s Voice*, 15 May 1946, p.2

¹⁶³ ‘What’s Wrong With Our Radio Programmes?’ *New Zealand National Review*, 15 April 1947, p.19

¹⁶⁴ ‘Modern Opera’, *Cue*, No.3, (1944,) p.12

¹⁶⁵ *Listener*, 10 May 1946, p.20

¹⁶⁶ ‘A Critic of Broadcasting’, *N.Z. Magazine*, Vol.25, No.4, (July-August 1946), p. 21

¹⁶⁷ Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/ Lowbrow: the Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 250

Stanley Aaronowitz, characterised European aristocrats and intellectuals for more than centuries. The ‘high’ bourgeoisie and intellectuals, acting as self-appointed cultural guardians, were protecting their privileged positions.¹⁶⁸ In Gramscian terms, in New Zealand as in Europe, the ‘passive residues’ of the intelligentsia opposed American musical culture because it threatened what they regarded as their monopoly to judge cultural tastefulness and quality.¹⁶⁹

This privileged cultural stance had awkward implications for a society which vociferously proclaimed its egalitarianism. Jazz, blues, swing, country and rock ‘n’ roll were all undeniably *popular* music, the sounds and songs of ordinary people, often of oppressed and under-privileged groups. These genres were the cultural progeny of Americans with subordinate social and legal status. According to Lewis Ehrburg,

the jazz world was one of the most egalitarian and pluralistic realms in American life....swing music was profoundly cosmopolitan, including blacks, Jews, Italians, Poles, Irish....In this context, swing offered a new model of social democracy and group life and in turn attracted players of mixed backgrounds and varied social groupings.¹⁷⁰

This music did not require the approval of the salon or the conservatory; its endorsement in New Zealand came from the milkbars, the smoke concerts, hit parade listeners and record buyers.

Many local cultural mandarins viewed with suspicion this perceived democratic ethos of American music. Many of its popular artists like Presley and Armstrong had minimal education, came from humble working-class backgrounds and lacked musical training and scholarship. Such factors, combined with the popularity of their music with so many people of similar backgrounds, led to claims that this proved the musical standards of ordinary New Zealanders were deplorably low and must be rectified.¹⁷¹ Attacks on American music contained a deep skepticism about the ability of ordinary New Zealanders to appreciate ‘good’ culture. Like Heidegger, our cultural elites deplored what they alleged was the homogenising and devitalising implications of American culture on its allegedly passive and intellectually moribund local audiences. Consequently, many of the educationally privileged such as Mason and Scott emulated Adorno, Leavis and Dwight Macdonald by assigning

¹⁶⁸ Stanley Aaronowitz, *Roll Over, Beethoven: the Return of Cultural Strife* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), pp.63-66

¹⁶⁹ Steve Jones, *Antonio Gramsci* (London: New York: Routledge, 2006), p.116

¹⁷⁰ Lewis Ehrburg, ‘Things To Come: Swing Bands, Bebop, and the Rise of a Postwar Jazz Scene’ in Lary May, ed, *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp.226-7

¹⁷¹ Some reviewers of Elvis Presley’s early New Zealand releases emphasised that he was a former truck driver. e.g. *Listener*, 21 September 1956, p.18

themselves the role of embattled protectors of high cultural values, repelling the forces of Americanised culture. They insisted that it was in the national interest to supervise and constrict American culture as a means of improving the cultural taste of the national audience, and uplifting them to the high bourgeois tastes of the elites.

This suspicion of popular musical taste received influential agency through James Shelley, the Director of the National Broadcasting System from its inception in 1936 until his retirement in 1949 and Oliver Duff, founding editor of the *Listener* from 1939 to 1949. Duff turned the *Listener* into a journal of cultural and literary discussion.¹⁷² Under his aegis the magazine became, according to one of his critics, ‘a literary journal possessing a very strong appeal for the small but vocal section of the cultural community.’¹⁷³ For years it refused to list upcoming commercial ZB programmes, which included broadcasts of jazz, Broadway shows etc, in the magazine’s ‘Things To Come’ section.¹⁷⁴ Until 1949, articles on music were devoted to classical music and composers, symphony orchestras, opera, chamber music, Gregorian chants. When American music did feature, it took the form of derogatory comment, usually about jazz, in the journal’s correspondence columns. It was not until Duff stepped down as editor in 1949 that the *Listener*’s attitude towards music became more inclusive and less patrician.¹⁷⁵

X

A significant proportion of unfavourable responses to American music involved a patronising and demeaning perception of the intelligence and cultural understanding of the audiences for that music. This attitude was longstanding. In 1932, for example, the Dunedin radio station 4YA committee dismissed listeners’ complaints that its music was too ‘highbrow’. One member complained that the public preferred the ‘very inferior stuff’ offered by the commercial ZB stations, and was incapable of appreciating 4YA’s ‘better class of music’. The chairman commented that ‘far too much prominence is given to those

¹⁷² McEldowney, Dennis. ‘Duff, Oliver 1883 - 1967’, Dictionary of New Zealand Biography, updated 22 June 2007 < www.dnzb.govt.nz/ >, accessed 31 May 2010. However, on Shelley’s orders, the coverage of current events excluded any mention of controversial matters, like politics or religion.

¹⁷³ Ian K. Mackay, *Broadcasting in New Zealand*, (Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed, 1953), p.128

¹⁷⁴ Mackay, *Broadcasting*, pp.129-130

¹⁷⁵ Antje Bednarek has interesting comments on the *Listener*’s cultural role in Bednarek, ‘Put on the Margins: the mainstream Culture and the Alienated Writer in the Fifties’, M.S.S. thesis, Lincoln University, 2006), *passim*

people who like jazz – the people who don't count.'¹⁷⁶ This contemptuous stance towards the intellectual and aesthetic abilities of the New Zealand public was typical of many of the administrative and educational elites throughout the twentieth century.

For such people, the public's enthusiasm for American music indicated a degenerate taste for an inferior cultural product, and an appetite for what one newspaper called 'entertainment directed at the sub-moronic'. It also proved that ordinary New Zealanders were intellectually and culturally childlike, even imbecilic.¹⁷⁷ Vituperative comments on the intelligence, upbringing, and moral probity of American musicians, and those New Zealanders who enjoyed listening to them, featured regularly in letters to the editor during the postwar period. 'As mites come to cheese and maggots to meat', wrote 'Kay', in 1946, listeners were drawn to jazz and crooner's ballads.¹⁷⁸ 'Music for Morons by Morons' claimed one *Listener* correspondent in 1946, indignant at a radio programme featuring 'demoralising songs by crooners and crooneresses.'¹⁷⁹ One letter-writer asked

Why has it [jazz] become so prevalent and so popular? The explanation most probably lies in the fact that the majority of people never grew up mentally but retain in adult life the standards of taste and judgement that belongs to the juvenile stage, which is primitive and indiscriminating.¹⁸⁰

This reaction to American music as debasing and contemptible entertainment by and for the emotionally and intellectually infantile was common in the early postwar era. In 1948 a letter to the *Star-Sun* alleged that the 'fourth-rate American vaudeville which mars our radio programmes' had an intellectual level of a 'primary school child' and constituted an insult to the intelligence of an adult New Zealander.'¹⁸¹ The *New Zealand Review* portrayed the audiences that listened to American music as puerile and infantile. It complained that New Zealand broadcasting displayed a 'marked disinclination to get up above the standards of the ordinary labouring man....'.¹⁸² The *Review* condemned commercial stations for broadcasting

¹⁷⁶ Transcript of meeting of 4YA Music and Dramatic Committee, 3 June 1932, cited in Day, *Radio Years*, p.154

¹⁷⁷ *New Zealand Observer*, 8 February 1950, p.11

¹⁷⁸ *Listener*, 7 June 1946, p.5

¹⁷⁹ *Listener*, 8 March 1946, p.5

¹⁸⁰ *Listener*, 22 April 1955, p.23 These interpretations of American popular culture have their parallels with those of some contemporary American intellectuals, notably Dwight Macdonald and Irving Howe, who essentially agreed with the Frankfurt school's argument that the general populace was essentially vapid, passive and incapable of judging the cultural and social merits of the fodder they were fed by the mass media. See Ross, *No Respect*, pp.42-62.

¹⁸¹ *Star-Sun*, 4 August 1948, p.2

¹⁸² 'What's Wrong With Our Radio Programmes?' *New Zealand National Review*, 15 April 1947, p. 20

low levels of jive and boogie-woogie, no-can-doing, pleading to be coaxed a little bit, drooling unmathematically in onesy-two-sey, promising to dig us later, hubba-bubba-bubba (whatever that might mean!) and climbing to high trebles fresh as a daisy, swung as a gate, high as the sky, sweet as a cookie, sour as a lemon, sharp as a razor. Listen for yourself. So much is of the essence of banality that no one of mature mind could suffer it. May we assume that the mature of mind do not listen?¹⁸³

Mature New Zealanders according to the *Review*, were able to ‘listen selectively’, and tuned into

grand things.... music from the finest operas ever performed.... plus the whole corpus of recorded music of the masters. Beethoven’s symphonic poems, the utter perfection of Mozart, the intense intellectuality of Bach and the romanticism of Berlioz, Weber, Liszt and Wagner....¹⁸⁴

Not only was the *Review*’s attitude grounded in a dichotomy of musical culture: classical / superior versus American / inferior. It also relied on an associated separation of audiences: classical / mature and wise versus popular /immature and superficial. D.S. Smith, the Chancellor of Victoria University College in 1947, declared that ‘Too much attention is paid to what is thought to be the attention of the majority [regarding musical and film preferences]’. He proposed to encourage the ‘lifting of [cultural] standards’. The quality of music the radios played and the movies the cinemas showed must be improved by having ‘public authorities’ establish ‘municipal picture houses’ and ‘a musical programme on the radio ... ranging from Gilbert and Sullivan to Bach’.¹⁸⁵

A revealing insight into these ‘official’ attitudes towards the New Zealand audiences of American music is provided by *Cue*, the journal of the New Zealand Education and Rehabilitation Service, best known by its unfortunate acronym, ERS.¹⁸⁶ According to *Cue*, the magazine was ‘intended to help unit officers in the running of discussion groups and similar activities.’ Its articles would supply ‘mental “ammunition”’ for such groups, thereby facilitating ‘profitable exchanges of opinions and the spreading of useful information and

¹⁸³ *National Review*, ‘What’s Wrong’, pp.19-20

¹⁸⁴ *National Review*, ‘What’s Wrong’, p. 19

¹⁸⁵ *Listener*, 23 May 1947, p.17

¹⁸⁶ By mid-1944 New Zealand’s major combat force was the 2nd NZEF, fighting in Italy, often alongside American units, especially in the battle for Cassino. Some months earlier some of the Force’s senior officers on leave in New Zealand during a furlough scheme met with Cabinet members and Army HQ representatives, to discuss an education and rehabilitation scheme for armed service personnel in that division. Accordingly, the New Zealand Education and Rehabilitation Service was established and attached to the 2nd NZEF. This unit developed programmes in order to prepare service personnel for eventual demobilization and absorption back into New Zealand life. *Cue*’s initial press run produced 3500 copies – one for every ten members of the division. W.G. Stevens, *Problems of 2NZEF Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939-45* (Wellington: War History Branch, Dept of Internal Affairs, 1958), 253-4; *Cue*, No. 1 (1945), statement opposite p.1; *Cue*, No.37 (1945), p.1.

knowledge....’¹⁸⁷ Several articles were virtual templates for how the officers assigned the task should direct the discussion on particular topics. They claimed to be accounts of ‘talks’ or lectures officers had delivered to assembled enlisted personnel. Several topics featured American cultural influences: music, movies and comics. In these cases the ‘talk’ was sharply critical of aspects of American culture, which were contrasted unfavourably with their British or European counterparts.

In one such article, ‘Basis of N.Z. Musical Culture’, Maxwell Fernie, who after the war was to become a prominent figure in Wellington’s classical music circles, insisted that ‘[i]f the “delicate bloom” of art is to survive and reproduce itself in full detail, it must be carefully tended and guided along correct lines.’¹⁸⁸ In another article he claimed that the New Zealand public “cannot be bothered” listening to music which entail[ed] a little thought and knowledge for its appreciation.’¹⁸⁹ Fernie’s defence of ‘high’ musical culture contrasted American popular music with what he insisted was ‘good music’ i.e. classical music. ‘Imported [American] dance music’ was inferior. ‘[I]ts appreciation,’ he claimed, ‘calls for little musical taste or knowledge’.¹⁹⁰ Fernie urged the imposition of correct cultural values ‘before the culture of other lands makes further headway....’ He outlined how this cultural inculcation should commence. ‘[S]ince New Zealanders are of British stock, the musical training of children should be focused initially in the singing, or playing as a member of an orchestra, of simple British folk tunes and airs’¹⁹¹

While Fernie assured his audience that British folk music was culturally and musically acceptable, he also drew their attention to the inferiority of its American counterpart. ““Hill Billy,” “State Border,” and certain negro songs in English, apart from being a very short-lived novelty attraction, have very little in common with New Zealand life....’ He also warned

most of the music in which they are clothed is of such poor quality that musically-minded people are reluctant to have anything to do with them. Truly, such editions could be termed the musical ‘version’ of the notorious ‘pulp magazines’ which a few years ago threatened to flood the Dominion.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ *Cue*, No.37, 1945, p.1

¹⁸⁸ Fernie, ‘N.Z. Musical Culture’, p.17

¹⁸⁹ Fernie, ‘Modern Opera’, *Cue*, No.3 (1944,) p.12

¹⁹⁰ Fernie, a musical scholar and a brilliant organist, was serving at the time as an officer in the 2nd NZEF. <www.maxwellfernietrust.com/Home.html.article.php?title=Remembering Maxwell Fernie>, “Sun Ra of Mass”, accessed 17 November 2009, *Listener*, 28 March-3 April 2009, pp.44-45.

¹⁹¹ Fernie, ‘N.Z. Musical Culture’, p., 17

¹⁹² Fernie ‘Basis of N.Z. Musical Culture’, pp.17-18

Unfortunately, Fernie maintained, the New Zealand public ‘couldn’t be bothered’ with classical music, which, unlike the ‘imported’ popular variety, ‘entails a little thought and knowledge for its appreciation’.¹⁹³

Korero, another armed forces journal, also issued during 1944-1945, was distributed to military units overseas.¹⁹⁴ Like *Cue*, it included articles offering ‘guidance’ on the dangers of modern, i.e. American, media to military personnel. The September 1944 issue included an article ‘Gramophone Recitals in Camp’. This described how an avuncular lieutenant extolled the superiority of ‘the better type of music’ over ‘popular’ music to the bemused audience sitting in the “rec hut”.

I’ve brought some music tonight which I hope you’ll enjoy. Some of it may be a little different from the kind you’ve been listening to, but I think most of you will be interested in it.... I call this programme “An Evening With the London Philharmonic Orchestra”.... Now we have the Symphony in D by Mozart.... At the end there is a spontaneous relaxing and a burst of applause. The officer stands up. “Well, that’s all for tonight. I hope you’ve enjoyed it. I don’t think any of you will regret Bing Crosby, eh?”¹⁹⁵

The article maintained that ‘very few of even the adolescents really like listening to ‘swing’ music’ and warned against allowing units to hold request sessions. These audiences, few of whom ‘know very much about music’, demanded music ‘whose only use is for dancing’.¹⁹⁶

An examination of ‘Gramophone Recitals’ reveals that it is yet another example of persuasion by proxy, in which official institutions like the army or training colleges acted as moral entrepreneurs and used authority figures such as teachers to convey critical or uncomplimentary attitudes towards American culture. ‘Recitals’, like some of the *Cue* articles, embodied a condescending approach towards music from the U.S.A. Embedded within these journals were patronising suspicions of popular cultural judgement, combined with a determination to guide it into approved cultural channels. It is impossible to assess the success of these efforts to influence the musical preferences of New Zealand troops.¹⁹⁷ They certainly didn’t influence the musical tastes of the members of the Kiwi Concert Party who played their own record collection for some of the 2nd NZEF’s troops. Private Gordon Slatter, one of those soldiers, was delighted to find that the collection consisted of American

¹⁹³ Fernie, ‘Modern Opera’, *Cue*, No. 3, 1944, p.12

¹⁹⁴ Published by the New Zealand Army Welfare Service

¹⁹⁵ ‘Gramophone Recitals in Camp’, *Korero*, 25 September 1944, pp.24-26

¹⁹⁶ *Korero*, 25 September 1944, pp. 26

¹⁹⁷ A brigadier in the 2nd NZEF believed that it was a ‘commonly voiced opinion’ that ERS’s only value was to ‘fill in men’s time and keep them out of mischief’. W.G. Stevens, *Problems of 2NZEF*, p.255

swing records. His fellow soldiers voted Glen Miller's *Moonlight Serenade* their favourite tune.¹⁹⁸ Maxwell Fernie would have been horrified.

XI

Some on the radical left maligned American music for other reasons. A 1954 article, 'Jazz – a People's Art or an Imperialist Weapon', published in the Marxist journal *New Zealand Labour Review* regretted that since 1945 'there had been a large movement, particularly of youth, in support of "Jazz"'. New Zealand Marxists were urged to encourage modern youth to reject 'the eroticism, escapism and subjectivism of jazz. To the extent that we fail, their minds will continue to be gripped musically by the inanities of Tin Pan Alley, or the eroticism of Bessie Smith.' The article wielded the ideological imprimatur of Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which had recently condemned jazz as 'decadent bourgeois music' and evidence of 'cosmopolitanism'. As such, jazz was condemned for its 'negation of the basic principles of classical music' and its 'renunciation of ... fundamental principles of musical composition'. It was also flawed by its 'subjectivism', being focused on the musicians' personal feelings, rather than 'revealing the essence of reality' to their audiences.¹⁹⁹ The role of the Marxist intellectual, the *Review* declared, was to lead 'our people' away from the false messiahs of American music, by using the classical tradition' as exemplars of 'good' music. The proletariat's national music heritage – 'folk songs, campfire ballads, and ... group and folk dancing' - could then be restored.²⁰⁰

For Elsie Locke and other contributors to the New Zealand Communist Party's newspaper, *People's Voice*, that heritage did not include the popular music emerging from the postwar local recording studios. The *Voice* deprecated New Zealand performers' work as merely 'imitative' of the dance-band and country music of the United States.' It also insisted New Zealand record companies' 'job is to plug a handful of "star" performers, mostly Americans', and warned:

FOR IN THE MARCH OF MONOPOLY COMMERCIAL RACKETEERING IS THE
MEANS –IMPOVERISHMENT OF OUR NATIONAL CULTURE IS THE END²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Gordon Slatter, *One More River: the Final Campaign of the Second New Zealand Division in Italy* (Wellington: David Ling Publishing, 1995), p.145

¹⁹⁹ 'Jazz – a People's Art or an Imperialist Weapon', *New Zealand Labour Review*, April 1954, pp.17-18

²⁰⁰ 'Jazz', p.19

²⁰¹ 'Kiwi Artists Outshine Overseas Stars', *People's Voice*, 30 January 1952, p.5

American music, therefore, was not only culturally inferior. As an agent of American cultural imperialism, it also hindered and demeaned the development of a distinctive New Zealand culture.

Only English folk music and its local derivatives found favour as popular music with Locke. In 1954, in an attempt to enrich Christchurch's proletarian culture, she and some NZCP colleagues formed the William Morris Group with the objective of 'promot[ing] among working people all forms ...of the creative arts'. This aim meant providing 'serious and light forms of entertainment, including light classics, modern songs, folksongs, poetry and progressive art'. The Group's letterhead announced 'The Art of the People, By the People, For the People'.²⁰² The very name of the group, suggested by Locke, proved contentious among local party members. Winston Rhodes, an English lecturer at Canterbury University College, presciently suggested that 'it may be taken as the intelligentsia trying to show off their superior knowledge'.²⁰³

Locke's preferred nomenclature prevailed. The Group included some folksingers, the Roustabouts, to which Locke belonged. 'We sang the kind of good English songs most people would prefer', she declared. She claimed that the William Morris Group's members were 'working class in the ordinary sense, with all the gusto and earnestness which is characteristic of the less refined and pretentious part of society'.²⁰⁴ However, her patronising comment indicates the distance between the musical tastes of the New Zealand public and the direction in which Locke, along with other public intellectuals like Shelley, wished to lead them.²⁰⁵ Though claiming to be for the masses, and acting in their best interests, the cultural preferences of New Zealand's radical left were essentially high bourgeois, detached from those of the wider New Zealand public on whose behalf they were working. Folk music, that thin sliver of 'popular' music whose merits they were prepared to acknowledge, was now of interest only to a small group of enthusiasts. Ironically, Locke and others on the

²⁰² Bill Pearson, sympathetic to the Communist movement in the immediate postwar era, much later recounted how the English Communist party, 'posturing as a defender of British values against imported American values' had 'eulogized William Morris as the great socialist English writer' at a conference in the early 1950s. Alex Calder, 'An Interview With Bill Pearson', *Landfall*, New Series, Vol.1, No.1 (April 1993), p.61

²⁰³ Chairman's Report, William Morris Group, 9 Feb, 1954, Papers Relating to the William Morris Group, Alexander Turnbull Library, MS Papers, 7202-041

²⁰⁴ Maureen Birchfield, *Looking For Answers: a Life of Elsie Locke* (Christchurch: University of Canterbury Press, 2009), p.312

²⁰⁵ As Melanie Nolan points out in her review of Birchfield's biography, Locke was a leading example of New Zealand's crop of 'twentieth century female intellectuals'. Nolan, review of *Looking for Answers*, *New Zealand Journal of History*, Vol.43, No.2 (September 2009), p.101

left failed to recognise that the New Zealand public preferred listening and dancing to the invigorating music derived from the working classes of America.

XII

The very popularity of American popular music caused complaints that the musical tastes of New Zealanders were being Americanised. ‘I have heard little tots rendering “Pistol Packin’ Momma”, “Am I Never Going to Have a Girl in My Arms?”, “Don’t Fence Me In” etc’ complained one listener in 1948.²⁰⁶ Waipawa’s M.P. acknowledged regretfully that listeners demanded ‘the dreadful Yankee noises that were heard over the air, but they should be kept to a minimum, and instead encouragement given to local artists, many of whom could give performances infinitely better than those of highly-paid American crooners.’²⁰⁷ Such cultural protectionism would produce economic benefit as well as aesthetic improvement for New Zealanders.

By engaging New Zealand artists, not only would we be fostering home talent, but would be keeping a lot of money in the country.... Even the poorest of their efforts would be preferable to 90 percent of the American swing....²⁰⁸

However, the novelist Ronald Hugh Morrieson had a much more enthusiastic response towards those essential American cultural products, music and movies. Born in 1922, and spending virtually all his life in Hawera, Morrieson enjoyed American popular music, especially blues and jazz from the New Orleans era. He hero-worshipped Charlie Parker and Fats Waller, even gorging himself on chocolate bars to give his voice the thick timbre of Waller. He liked jazz’s ‘connection with the outcasts of society, like the black musicians who lived outside the establishment and the law’. By listening to the radio and records, Morrieson taught himself the techniques of rhythm and blues musicians.²⁰⁹ During the interwar and postwar decades New Zealand musicians like Morrieson appropriated aspects of American popular music. Some, such as the Tumbleweeds, made their own recordings of staple American genres -rock ‘n’ roll, country and western, and Hawaiian

²⁰⁶ *Listener*, 4 June, 1948, p5

²⁰⁷ NZPD, Vol. 275 (1945), p.425

²⁰⁸ *Star-Sun*, 1 October 1946, p.2

²⁰⁹ About 1943 Morrieson and some friends formed a dance band, and until 1959, in between bouts of heavy drinking and serial womanising, he played in various bands in Taranaki dance halls. Julia Mirren, *Ronald Hugh Morrieson* (Auckland; David Ling Publishing, 1996), pp.63-3; 87; 96; Julia Mirren, ‘Morrieson, James Ronald Hugh 1922 -1972’. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*. updated 22 June, 2007 < <http://www.dnzb.govt.nz>> accessed 4 June 2008. The list of Morrieson’s band repertoire reveals that of the twenty tunes listed, thirteen were American, three or four New Zealand, two Irish and one English.

music. They based their repertoire on arrangements of songs by Gene Autry and other American country performers.

The first commercial record wholly processed in New Zealand, the 1949 ballad *Blue Smoke*, written by Ruru Karaitiana, a Maori Battalion soldier and dance band musician on a troopship in 1940, and later performed by a New Zealand vocalist and band, marked ‘the real birth of New Zealand’s indigenous record industry’. According to Chris Bourne, it represented a ‘cultural breakthrough’. In an example of New Zealand music influencing American artists, Dean Martin and other American vocalists recorded cover versions.²¹⁰ By the late 1940s New Zealanders were establishing small recording companies such as Zodiac, Stebbings, and TANZA; significantly, the latter label was an acronym for ‘To Assist NZ Artists’.²¹¹ The founder of TANZA, Stan Dallas, admitted that his label was ‘copying American releases and beating them to it, using local talent....There wasn’t a New Zealand sound, we were just copying America’.²¹² These small recording companies used local musicians such as Cooper, the Duplicats and Mavis Rivers to record cover versions of American hits, like ‘Mocking Bird Hill’, and jazz and country music staples. By 1951 Zodiac was releasing records of New Zealanders’ performances of jazz, ballads and country music.

This plethora of local versions of American musical genres, and the imitation of American musical techniques and styles suggested that popular American music could be construed as a hegemonic threat to a national musical culture. Perhaps, as Locke and others on the Left maintained, it merely encouraged facile local imitations of the American musical models, inhibiting rather than encouraging the local popular musical culture.²¹³ However, Martin Finlay and others insisted that ‘foreign’ songs and recordings had a vitalising, catalytic effect on New Zealand bands and the fledgling local record industry. These

²¹⁰ Chris Bourke, ‘Out of the Blue’, *Listener*, 28 February 2009, p.32; Bourne, *Blue Smoke*, pp.153-163

²¹¹ Martin Finlay, ‘To Assist New Zealand Artists’, *Here & Now*, March 1952, p.4; Bourne, *Blue Smoke*, pp.153-163

²¹² Spittle, *Counting the Beat*, p.25

²¹³ Some commentators see this musical ‘outgrowth of a different country’s culture’ as a major feature of British popular musical culture during 1943-1956, exemplifying American cultural imperialism. According to Julie Smith, the arrival of rock ‘n’ roll in Britain in the mid-fifties was part of an American threat to ‘British cultural integrity, creativity and public order’. Michael Sturma claims the expansion of the Australian record industry and the introduction of the ‘top tune’ programming concept to Australian radio, along with the arrival of rock ‘n’ roll, ‘seemed to make American culture all the more intrusive’. Laura and Lee Cooper, “The Pendulum of Cultural Imperialism: Popular Music Interchange Between Britain and the United States, 1943-1967”, in S.Ramet & G. Crnkovic, eds, *Kzaaaam! Splat! Ploof!: The American Impact on European Popular Culture Since 1945* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), p.69; Julie Smith, “From American Invasion to British Innovation: the Evolution of Rock Music in Great Britain, 1954-1967”, (Ph.D. thesis, University of Arkansas, 1999); p.69; Michael Sturma, “The Politics of Dancing: When Rock ‘n’ Roll Came to Australia”, *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol.25, No.4 (Spring 1992), p.129

performing artists also recorded tunes written by local songwriters, and Maori songs.²¹⁴ Of their kind', Finlay claimed, 'they are hearteningly good, comparing favourably with similar overseas efforts and technically of a high order.'²¹⁵ These New Zealand artists and recording labels sold so many copies that, unlike U.S. record labels, British companies like HMV and EMI tried to stifle the local music industry at birth by withholding their product to local record stores selling New Zealand disks.²¹⁶

Maori appropriation and adaptation of American music in the midcentury began in late 1939 a member of what would soon become the Maori Battalion wrote new lyrics for an American gridiron song, the 'Washington and Lee Swing'. During the war this became the Battalion's marching song. So great was its popularity with New Zealanders that Chris Bourke calls a 'national anthem'.²¹⁷ During the war, a Maori composer, Tuini Ngawai, a Ngati Porou from Tokomaru Bay, had written for the Maori Battalion several works based on American popular songs. These included 'Arohaina Mai, e te Kingi Nui' (Great King Bestow Thy Love). In her composition, the romantic American ballad "Love Walked In" became the basis of a solemn, anthem, which Sir Apirana Ngata described as 'an invocation to the Father of them all to guard the men of the Maori Battalion and to bestow upon them His gracious blessings'. Another of her compositions, 'Te Hokowhitu Toa', became a favourite with the Battalion's C Company, and was sung at an emotional concert in Palmerston North before the Battalion departed overseas. This song was based on a recent American ballad, 'Lock My Heart and Throw Away the Key', popularized by both Billie Holliday and Oran 'Hot Lips' Page.²¹⁸

Some regarded Maori adaptation of American musical features and their incorporation within a specifically Maori musical context as trivializing and devaluing traditional indigenous music. One Pakeha, Eric Ramsden, deplored what he called 'Neglect of Cultural Sources of Musical Inspiration: Cheap and Tawdry Borrowed Tunes'. He claimed that Maori,

instead of turning to their own altars ... are worshipping at a cheap and garish swine, one unworthy of Maori tradition.... One can only hope that someday day a young Maori will

²¹⁴ Spittle, *Counting the Beat*, p.17

²¹⁵ Finlay, p. 4; Spittle, *Counting the Beat*, pp.15-17; 23-28

²¹⁶ *Truth*, 19 August 1953, p.20; Finlay, p.4;

²¹⁷ 'Maori Battalion March to Victory Song', <<http://www.28maoribattalion.org.nz/node/3896>>, accessed 3 February 2011; Bourke, *Blue* p.100. The new lyrics were provided by Private Anania Amohau; the new arrangement was done by Lieutenant Pike, the Trentham camp's Bandmaster. Bourke, *Blue Smoke*, p.100

²¹⁸ 'Modern Maoris and Their Music', *NZ Magazine*, Vol.28, No.2 (Winter 1949), pp. 17-19

arise who will return to the altars of old, to the source of real inspiration, and give posterity something really worth-while both in words and music.²¹⁹

But some Maori defended the practice. The Maori compere of a 1949 Wellington concert of Maori music observed that some of the audience would recognize modern hit tunes ‘and perhaps wonder and criticise’. Yet he maintained

we are moving in a modern world, and like yourselves, we have been caught in the tide of the so-called modern music with all its jazzy syncopation and crooning. The tunes only we have borrowed; the words and the interpretations are our own....²²⁰

Another wave of indigenous appropriation of American music began with the arrival of rock ‘n’ roll to New Zealand. In 1954, Johnny Cooper - ‘the Maori cowboy’ - a fan of Autry and Hank Williams, formed the Range Rangers and initially recorded cover versions of country hits. Cooper started by recording a cover of *Rock Around the Clock*. He then adapted the rock ‘n’ roll genre, first by recording his own version of *See You Later, Alligator*. He then wrote and recorded what Chris Bourke describes as ‘New Zealand’s first indigenous rock ‘n’ roll classic: *Piecart Rock and Roll*.²²¹ With its chorus of ‘Rock to the rhythm of the pea, pie, pud’, Cooper’s song shows how rapidly New Zealand artists appropriated and relocated a new American musical genre into an indigenous setting, using it to comment on local cultural idiosyncrasies.

In 1955 ‘hordes’ of young Maori began flocking to Wellington’s Ngati Poneke [Young Maori Club], which had started to play rock ‘n’ roll, along with Hawaiian and ballroom numbers. Their numbers were soon swollen by many pakeha, especially females, eager to hear and dance to the latest American musical genre.

This was the time when the Maori boys and Pakeha girls started pairing off. The Pakeha girls got sick of their ballroom dancing up the road. They came to dance rock ‘n’ roll with the Maori boys....²²²

This enthusiastic adoption of American popular music by Maori, and the ability of that music to transcend Maori-Pakeha cultural differences within a significant New Zealand social setting invites comparison with a similar feature occurring at the same time in the United States. Brian Ward and Michael Bertrand have shown that the fusion of white country and hill-billy with black rhythm and blues to create rock ‘n’ roll not only transformed American musical culture; it also helped transform race relations in the post-1945 decade. Both historians demonstrate that rock ‘n’ roll’ played a major part in revising

²¹⁹ ‘Modern Maoris’, p.17

²²⁰ ‘Modern Maoris’ p.17-18

²²¹ Bourke, ‘Out of the Blue’, p.35; *Blue Smoke*, pp.265-6

²²² Recollections of Kate Mackie, in White, *Light Fantastic*, pp.160.

racial attitudes after the war. That music's success in popularising black performers and black musical styles and techniques with white audiences, consumers and producers represented a crucial shift in race relations.²²³ Similarly, Maori enthusiasm for these American musical genres, ranging from crooner-style ballads and swing to rock 'n' roll, styles as popular with Pakeha as with Maori, illustrated the potential that this shared enjoyment of American music had for reshaping New Zealanders' racial sensibilities.

XIII

Although some responses to American music remained uncompromisingly hostile, by 1956 some bastions of resistance were crumbling. Evidence of this can be found in the *Listener*, which from 1950 displayed a more positive attitude towards jazz.²²⁴ Its letters to the editors, for years the source of derogatory comments about jazz, increasingly featured the views of correspondents who defended jazz, and attacked its opponents' often racist attitudes and also their derogatory assumptions about the intellectual and social maturity of jazz musicians and their audiences. Such people, claimed one writer, were 'blustering bigots trotting out the hackneyed protestations of the patrician aesthete'.²²⁵ The level of jazz musicianship was also praised; Benny Goodman's music, for example, demonstrated 'serious study of harmony, melody and counterpoint'.²²⁶ One correspondent eulogised that '[j]azz is the one true art form to come from the United States ... improvisation, exhibition of technical skill and pure expression of the artist's emotion unequalled in any other art form'.²²⁷ After W.H. Holcroft replaced Oliver Duff as the *Listener*'s editor in 1949, he began to include articles and cover stories on various jazz artists such as Bix Beiderbecke and Duke Ellington. A November 1950 issue commemorated the anniversaries of Sir Arthur Sullivan and Louis Armstrong, respective icons of British and American popular music in

²²³ Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness and Race Relations* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998); Michael Bertrand, *Race, Rock, and Elvis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000). The acceptance of rock 'n' roll as interracial music for interracial audiences was symbolised by the white singer Carl Perkins' recording of 'Blue Suede Shoes'. This was the first record to reach the top of the popular, country and rhythm and blues charts. With tongue perhaps slightly in cheek, Stanley Booth suggests this was the most important step in the evolution of American racial consciousness since the Emancipation Proclamation. Stanley Booth, *Rhythm Oil* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991), p.15

²²⁴ Johan Fornas claims that 'by around 1950 jazz had become an accepted part of the domestic music scene'. Fornas, 'Exclusion, Polarization', p.229

²²⁵ *Listener*, 13 May 1955, p.5

²²⁶ *Listener*, 13 May 1955, p.5

²²⁷ *Listener*, 31 April 1956, p.5

different centuries. By 1955 the journal was publishing cover articles on W.C. Handy and Duke Ellington.²²⁸

Another indication of the new-found respectability of American music in the eyes of *Listener* occurred in 1954 when Owen Jensen's *New Recordings* article 'What makes a piece of music popular?' favourably discussed Dixie jazz and Benny Goodman's band alongside Tchaikovski, Dvorak and Ponchielli.²²⁹ In 1955 the journal's reviews of new musical LPs, previously confined to 'serious' music, now extended to include jazz and other 'popular' American genres. In the early 1940s Jensen's *Music Ho!* journal contained references critical of such popular music. Now his 'New Recordings' column in the *Listener* included erudite and positive comments not only on a Mozart violin concerto and Haydn's *Philemon and Baucis*, but also on Artie Shaw and the Oscar Petersen Quartet. The *Listener's* new approach to American music did not go unnoticed. L.D. Austin, a vehement critic of twentieth century music, declared that he was 'perturbed by the many symptoms of musical regression.... One ominous sign of this decline is the growing support given by *The Listener* to jazz and its followers.'²³⁰

XIV

In 1956, the year Elvis Presley records, and the rock 'n' roll musical *Rock Around the Clock* arrived in New Zealand, the *Listener's* editor M.H. Holcroft acknowledged a fundamental shift in New Zealand's musical and cultural allegiances. He wrote a wry editorial on jukeboxes, that quintessentially American purveyor of popular music. They had recently appeared in New Zealand milkbars, themselves an American importation and a popular gathering-place for New Zealand youth. The juke-boxes, their gleaming chrome and shiny white exteriors offset by the amber interior lights enticingly illuminating the polished black lacquer of the disks, provided access to hit parade songs. For Holcroft, the arrival and

²²⁸ *Listener*, 1950, 24; 18 August 1950, pp.18-19; 21 April 1950, p.7; 17 November 1950; 4 April 1952, p.19; 6 May 1955, pp.27-27; 27 September 1950, p.7; 18 November 1955, p.6

²²⁹ *Listener*, 9 April 1954, pp.18-19

²³⁰ *Listener*, 17 August 1956, p.18 Austin was a fascinating figure on the New Zealand musical landscape. Born in London in 1877 and trained in Europe as a classical pianist, on migrating to New Zealand he played the piano and sometimes conducted an orchestra at silent film showings in Christchurch, Wellington and Dunedin before this career ended with the arrival of talkies. He composed music and taught the piano, and wrote newspaper columns on music. Described by a biographer as 'obsessionally retrogressive' in his musical tastes, Austin frequently wrote scathing and erudite letters to newspapers and journals deploring 'modern' music. For Austin good music ended with the last of the Romantic composers. John Mansfield Thomson. 'Austin, Louis Daly Irving - Biography', Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 1-Sep-10 <<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/4a24/1>>, accessed 15 July 2010

popularity of jukeboxes signalled American musical culture's predominance over its British counterpart. It was also a significant point of demarcation in New Zealand's relationship with the United Kingdom. 'In New Zealand', Holcroft declared,

our interest in what happens in England can now be little more than academic. We are on our own again, isolated from good example, and already exposed to milk bar syncopation.²³¹

Holcroft's recognition that New Zealand cultural loyalties had evolved was reinforced by the reception of a cultural icon in 1956: the release of the movie *Rock Around the Clock*.²³² Although rock 'n' roll music and dancing, as portrayed in the film, was possibly more flamboyant than jitterbugging, and some of its performers younger than those associated with jazz, crooning and Broadway melodies, it is revealing that there was most of the local responses were relatively benign and accepting. This is significant, because as Paul Friedlander points out, the key ingredients of early rock and roll – its 'syncopated rhythm, raw vocal emotionalism, and work-chant "call and response"' – were all unequivocally of American, indeed, African-American, origin. Its progenitors, rhythm and blues, and country / hill-billy, were the music of the black and white working-classes respectively. The new genre also utilised a throbbing, raucous, backbeat and sometimes presented a suggestive treatment of romance.²³³ Sometimes the very titles and lyrics of rock 'n' roll songs were compilations of incomprehensible American slang: 'A-wop-bop-a-loo-bop a-lop-bam-boom Tutti Frutti aw Rudie' sang Little Richard.

Although virtually all accounts of rock 'n' roll's arrival in New Zealand portray it as startlingly new, in fact both the music and the dance were quickly recognised here as variants of the American thirties and forties swing offspring, the 'Lindy Hop' and the jitterbug.²³⁴ '[T]he juveniles were there simply to beat time to the music and were so obviously enjoying themselves that I hadn't the heart to tell them that the style of dancing they were applauding was old hat before many of them reached the kindergarten' commented the *Listener*'s reviewer.²³⁵

Some responses to the film's music were critical. They invoked the familiar tropes of savagery, dangerously uncontrolled libido and unbridled capitalism spreading its cultural tentacles. A 1956 *Herald* editorial condemned rock 'n' roll music as a 'subhuman

²³¹ *Listener*, 22 June 1956, p.4

²³² Its eponymous song had preceded it here by a year. Performed by the 29 year-old Bill Haley, it had initially become popular when used on the soundtrack of the film *Blackboard Jungle*. Some of Haley's band were in their thirties; a balding Haley was approaching thirty.

²³³ Paul Friedlander, *Rock and Roll: a Social History* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), p.16; p21

²³⁴ White, *Light Fantastic*, pp.164-5

²³⁵ *Listener*, 2 November 1956, p.17

manifestation'. One Christchurch observer of the musical's audience reiterated a common trope. Writing under the significant pseudonym 'Forward to the Jungle', (s)he objected to the audience's 'stamping and whistling', and the 'savage, primitive, deplorable music'. The most negative critical reception given the music came from *Here & Now*. This journal remarked that

The music itself is the product of a hectically competitive music industry straining for novelty: it does invite one to dance with hypnotic abandon and self-display, but to listen to it is more monotonous than boogie-woogie...it can hardly last longer than did the Davy Crockett craze.... One cannot see how musicians can play well or live long if every one of them, pianist included, has to writhe and jump, while he is playing, while the bass man lies like Europa under his bull-fiddle, slapping it held between his legs, and climbing on top of it too. One cannot accept the cinema's claim that 'a number of people have gone away uplifted', or that the dancing is as natural and as wholesome and refreshing as the polka must have been in the days of our grandfathers.²³⁶

However, most reviews of the movie, its music and its audience were positive.²³⁷ The same issue of the *Star-Sun* that carried articles about alleged 'milling crowds of [overseas] teenagers worked up into a state of emotionalism' by *Rock Around the Clock*'s music, also carried Cabinet minister Hilda Ross's endorsement of the film, music and all. 'I could not see anything in the film to make the world go mad. I believe the young people of New Zealand will behave themselves over it.'²³⁸ Ross and the Minister of Internal Affairs had earlier previewed the film, which both declared harmless. Both doubted that New Zealand teenagers were so 'emotionally unsuitable' as to react inappropriately to the film and its music.²³⁹ The film censor, Gordon Mirams, who had recently cut scenes showing 'exaggerated hip movements' of rock 'n' roll dancers from a newsreel, followed the lead of his Australian and British counterparts in approving the film for general exhibition.²⁴⁰

As Mirams noted, the release of *Rock Around the Clock* 'passed off without any untoward incident' in New Zealand's main centres.²⁴¹ Even *Here & Now*'s disapproving view of the film's music grudgingly admitted that the audience displayed 'nothing more rowdy than some adolescent hand-clapping, some whistling and stamping, a little squealing in the rain after the show'.²⁴² Newspapers approved the restrained behaviour of local audiences. The manager of a big-city cinema declared that 'our audiences are enthusiastic,

²³⁶ *Here & Now*, November 1956, p.10.

²³⁷ *Herald*, 20 October 1956, p.10; *Star-Sun*, 25 October 1956, p.2

²³⁸ *Star-Sun*, 3 October 1956, p.2; p.4

²³⁹ *Star-Sun*, 18 September 1956, p.3

²⁴⁰ List of NZ censorship deletions, 1950 – 1957: IA 2/7/2, ANZ, cited in Redmer Yska, *All Shook Up: the Flash Bodgie and the Rise of the New Zealand Teenager in the Fifties* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1993), p.109

²⁴¹ *Evening Post*, 23 October 1956 p.10

²⁴² *Here & Now*, November 1956 p.10

they stamp and clap, but that's where it stops....[they know] how to behave themselves'.²⁴³ Even academics commented on the reception of the first rock 'n' roll movie. Victoria University College's lecturer in Psychology emerged bemused from a screening to approve the audience's 'staid behaviour'.²⁴⁴ A *Herald* survey of Auckland record store and dance hall proprietors suggested a muted reaction to both the music and the dance-style. The *Herald* approvingly noted that '[I]t seems New Zealand youth is accepting the music calmly and that any violence from the rock an' roll cult is a long way off.'²⁴⁵

Several reports observed that *Rock Around the Clock*'s New Zealand patrons were not confined to teenagers: 'drawing –and pleasing – more and more older Aucklanders, as well as the youngsters'.²⁴⁶ Indeed, local advertisements for the film proclaimed its appeal for all ages: 'Whether you're a nipper or a nanny you won't stop laughing at the crazy antics of American youth in this age of Rock 'n' Roll!'²⁴⁷ Wellingtonian Irene George was in her early forties when she saw *Rock Around the Clock*. An analysis of her notebooks reveals that during the period 1950-56, she regularly attended musical and theatrical performances ranging from classical music, classical ballet, and Shakespearean drama to the Harlem Blackbirds, jazz concerts, and local productions of Broadway musicals. From 1956 she also watched most of the ensuing cycle of films based on rock 'n' roll musical performances, including *Rock Rock Rock*, as well as Elvis Presley musicals.²⁴⁸ Her musical tastes were obviously eclectic, a feature she probably shared with others of her 'older' generation. However, many newspaper reviews preferred to focus on the film's youthful audience.²⁴⁹ *Truth*'s film critic admitted to being 'vague' about rock 'n' roll music before seeing *Rock Around the Clock*. Although deploring the film's production values and acting, 'M.S.' praised its music and dancing, deciding that

I personally am all in favour of rock 'n' roll. There is nothing wrong with youngsters who want to dance and dance. It gets rid of a lot of their pent-up energy and helps them to overcome the emotional difficulties and frustrations that most young people have.²⁵⁰

²⁴³ *Listener*, 9 November 1956 p.9

²⁴⁴ *Post*, 22 October 1956, p.10

²⁴⁵ *Herald*, 11 September 1956, p.12

²⁴⁶ *Star*, 11 October 1956, p.8

²⁴⁷ Newspaper advertisement for Auckland's Regent Theatre, cited in White, *Light Fantastic*, p.168

²⁴⁸ Note Books, DO 618, Folder 6, Irene George Collection, New Zealand Film Archive, Wellington.

²⁴⁹ As some newspaper reports, and Irene George's notebook listings suggest, the audience for rock 'n' roll was not confined to teenagers, a common and careless assumption in most analyses, here and overseas, about that music and its impact. Youthful audiences had a wider discretionary spending power and more leisure time for records, movie soundtracks, and concerts than did older people, many of whom had family and other commitments that prevented a sustained monetary and leisure consumption of rock 'n' roll. That did not mean that older age groups did not listen to, or enjoy, the genre, especially on radio. This topic still lacks investigation. Accordingly, the stereotyped association of fifties rock 'n' roll with a teenage audience prevails.

²⁵⁰ *Truth*, 30 October p.28

Towards the end of 1956, in a sure indication of changing cultural mores, *Listener* published its first cover story on rock music. It featured a white musician, Bill Haley, and its article on rock 'n' roll respectfully treated the music as representing the conjunction and evolution of several uniquely American musical genres.²⁵¹ A few months later a reviewer commented on the music of the film *The Girl Can't Help It*, which featured rock 'n' roll songs and performers considerably more exuberant and risqué than those in *Rock Around the Clock*. The music, he observed benignly, was 'played fortissimo and stereophonically, and accompanied by the stamping of an uninhibited phalanx of two-and-nine pennies.'²⁵² By early 1957, Wellington's Town Hall was packed out by an audience of 2300 attending a rock 'n' roll jamboree. A few months later, the Dunedin dance promoter Joe Brown, retracted his ban on rock 'n' roll music being played at his Saturday night dances, a local social institution. A rock 'n' roll marathon was held, and rock 'n' roll music and dancing was now permitted in the august concert chamber of the city's Town Hall. An *Otago Daily Times* poll taken at that time showed that most respondents regarded rock 'n' roll as harmless, and just another craze.²⁵³

The public and journalistic reaction to *Rock Around the Clock* and to its musical genre suggests that by the mid-1950s, American musical culture had lost whatever ability it once possessed to shock and offend New Zealanders, except for cultural gatekeepers. An analysis of the *Star-Sun*'s letter columns of 1956 shows that the complaints about American music that appeared regularly during the immediate postwar years had almost disappeared. One writer objected to Colombo Street juke-boxes playing 'that "drippy" recording *Rock Around the Clock*', with its listeners 'slinking around with what they fondly imagine is a Hollywood step in time to the music'.²⁵⁴ Two correspondents deplored 'cheap, bawdy songs which are an insult to the intelligent listener' and musical 'rubbish' played on the radio.²⁵⁵ This acceptance of American popular music did not necessarily mean the displacement of its British or New Zealand equivalents – or even of classical music. As Bill Manhire, then a keen teenage patron of Dunedin Town Hall concerts in the late fifties and early sixties points

²⁵¹ *Listener*, 9 November 1956

²⁵² 'Two-and-nine pennies' refers to the cost of admission for a certain area of the cinema. *Listener*, 22 February 1957, p.7 It was the equivalent of about \$NZ9 today.

²⁵³ White, *Light Fantastic*, pp.169-70; Peter J. Read, 'Blue Suede Gumboots: the Impact of Imported Popular Culture on New Zealand in the 1950s' (M.A. Thesis, University of Otago, 1990), p.109

²⁵⁴ *Star-Sun*, 6 April 1956, p.2

²⁵⁵ *Star-Sun*, 31 July 1956, p.2; 8 August 1956, p.2

out, 'On the one hand, I would happily go to Del Shannon or the Everly Brothers. On the other hand, I would go just as happily to Jimmy Shand and his band or the Howard Morrison Quartet. Or there might be a Mozart opera at His Majesty's Theatre.'²⁵⁶



Figure 6. Rocking to the Radio. The rock 'n' roll 'craze' arrives in New Zealand, 1956. Note the music is disseminated by radio, an indication that this medium was a powerful influence in delivering American music to the population in the 1950s.

When a *Star-Sun* cartoonist commented on rock 'n' roll in New Zealand in 1956, his representation was benign. Four well-dressed teenagers are happily dancing in their living room to a rock 'n' roll song while their parents sit reading a newspaper headline about nuclear tests, and complain wryly that 'the kids' are already 'too radio-active'.²⁵⁷ The cartoon did not depict glowering teenagers, unruly adolescents or generational conflict. The cartoonist's portrayal of parental reaction to rock 'n' roll is not one of fear, anger or even concern. Instead, it is a wry acceptance of changing musical tastes – and an admission that there were far greater menaces than rock 'n' roll in the mid fifties.

²⁵⁶ Bill Manhire, 'An Interview With Bill Manhire', < <http://www.nzecp.auckland.ac.nz/authors/manhire/sharp.asp> > [NZ Electronic Poetry Centre], accessed 26 April 2010

²⁵⁷ *Star-Sun*, 6 October 1956, p.2

XV

By 1955-6 such archetypical American musical genres as jazz, Broadway ballads and even rock 'n' roll had become increasingly accepted within New Zealand as valid forms of musical culture. The majority of the public had long recognized American music's qualities of innovation and adaptation, as well as its tensile strength and impulsive energy. No longer were American musicians and performers automatically dismissed by cultural guardians as primitive and infantile. They were less likely to be judged on a continuum of musical virtue in which classical music was valued as 'good' and American music rejected as inherently inferior. Their listeners and audiences were less likely to be condescendingly derided as musical simpletons. The intellectual and official elites' attempts to enforce cultural standards that aligned with their own privileged aesthetic tastes were becoming increasingly ineffectual. New Zealand musicians were now appropriating and adapting American musical forms for their own local purposes and pleasures, and their efforts were increasingly regarded as a source of national pride. While articles, public intellectuals, editorials and newspaper correspondents frequently condemned contemporary features of American politics and foreign policy, music, that essential conveyer of American popular culture, had become, at the very least, tolerated, and increasingly accepted and sometimes admired.

Responses within New Zealand to American musical culture during the period from the 1940s to 1956, and their previous embedment earlier in the century, demonstrate a process in which traditional cultural loyalties were being transformed by the impact of American cultural influences, of which music was one of the most important. Just as the popularity of American films and comics in postwar New Zealand was regarded by some as a form of cultural disloyalty to the 'Motherland', so too was the enthusiastic reception given by many New Zealanders to American music. The widespread popularity of jazz, swing and rock 'n' roll, and their American performers, was viewed by many of the civic and cultural elites as corroding our traditional cultural allegiances to Britain. Culturally, as well as strategically and emotionally, New Zealanders were re-defining the Dominion's relationship with the imperial power.

CHAPTER FOUR

‘THE DEVIL IN INK’: THE DEMONISATION OF ‘AMERICAN’ COMICS

I

New Zealanders’ reactions to American comics during the immediate postwar period constituted part of an imported global debate. Campaigns against American comics occurred in at least seventeen countries across three continents.¹ As disputants, those New Zealanders opposed to this medium employed the same rhetorical repertoires of their counterparts in Canada, France, the United States, Britain, and latterly, Australia. These included citations of anecdotal ‘evidence’, manipulation of statistics of dubious validity, and publication of ‘psychological’ accounts of the dire effects of such literature.² In New Zealand, as overseas, these allegations concealed political and ideological motivations, and anxieties about socio-cultural status.

My intention in this chapter is not to examine the reception of comics in mid-century New Zealand from the perspective of the usual suspect in the historiography of that subject: as an example of a moral panic brazenly exploited by the Holland government for political gain in an election year. This long-standing mythology of twentieth century New Zealand history will be examined in the next chapter. Instead, my investigation focuses on examining New Zealanders’ reactions to so-called ‘American’ comics and the assumptions that underlay their responses. Many of these attitudes shared commonalities to be found in the hostile reception of Hollywood films and American music by influential figures in New Zealand elites. Comics and pulp magazines were accused of vulgarity, depravity, and sexuality, condemned as purveyors of violence and crime, and denounced as the agents by which the superficial and false values of a shallow and un-British culture were being imposed upon the nation, especially its youth. That culture was depicted, like its cinematic and musical counterparts, as the embodiment of a coarse and commercial ‘low’ culture, the antithesis of civilised aesthetic values. The popularity of American comics with New Zealanders galvanised its hostile reception by elitist elements. As I will demonstrate, such acceptance concerned the likes of A.R.D. Fairburn, W.J. Scott and Elsie Locke.

¹ Martin Barker, ‘Getting a Conviction: Or, How the British Horror Comics Campaign *Only* Just Succeeded’ in John A. Lent, ed, *Pulp Demons: International Dimensions of the Postwar Anti-Comics Campaign* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), p. 69

² Richard Jobs, ‘Tarzan Under Attack: Youth, Comics, and Cultural Reconstruction in Postwar France’, in *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 26, No.4 (Fall 2003), p.688

In their view, it proved that the cultural tastes of New Zealanders required paternalistic supervision and control.

In order to justify these demands for surveillance and oversight, such New Zealanders participated in a sustained campaign of denigration of American comics in New Zealand. Its participants ranged across the political spectrum. Here, as overseas, these comics became a scapegoat to blame for the frequently asserted postwar rise in juvenile delinquency. They were also a site of global engagement and intervention in which interest groups and the state attempted to monitor and regulate American cultural influences.³ The comics discourse in New Zealand was a struggle for cultural power and status in which opponents of comics attempted to manipulate public opinion in order to influence government policy. These interest groups relied on American professional expertise and American-derived evidence and arguments to support their contentions that American comics were a social and cultural menace that required censorship or interdiction as a matter of public safety. At the same time that the anti-comics campaigns within the U.S.A. reflected the McCarthyite witch-hunt against so-called communist ‘infiltration’ and domestic ‘subversion’, New Zealand campaigners employed the same dubious tactics. They used polemical language, unsubstantiated assertions and problematic statistics, as well as allegations of corruption and contamination, in their arguments that pernicious comics were pouring into the country, readily accessible to the young, and operating as undercover agents of American cultural subversion.⁴

The comics discourse in early postwar New Zealand was not ‘simply about comics’. In its widest perspective, it was part of a centuries-old continuum of unease and disquiet that results from the unsettling effects of all new forms of communication. The invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century initiated one such burst of innovation and unease. In eighteenth century England the increasingly cheap mass commercialism of print led to concerns that the popular print culture would not only corrupt that nation’s literary culture but would also contaminate the moral fabric of society.⁵ ‘Print’, claims Alvin Kernan, ‘was both the image and the instrument of ...new ways of thinking and doing’. For Alexander Pope, the most eloquent of that century’s English opponents of the new culture, printer’s ink was a flood of darkness that spread across the land

³ e.g. Goran Jovanovic and Ulrich Koch, ‘The Comics Debate in Germany: Against Dirt and Rubbish’, in John A. Lent, ed, *Pulp Demons: International Dimensions of the Postwar Anti-Comics Campaign* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), p.119

⁴ See Steven Mitchell, ‘Devious Paths: the Crime Committee and the Comic Book, Of Red-Hot Thrills - and More’, *Comics Buyers Guide*, 21 July 1955, p.66, cited in John A. Lent, “The Comics Debates Internationally: Their Genesis, Issues, and Commonalities” in Lent, *Pulp Demons*, p.12

⁵ Alvin Kernan, *Printing Technology, Letters & Samuel Johnson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp.11-18

staining the white page, as in his image of the cloacal outflow of the Fleet ditch discharging into the silver Thames.⁶

All media are social as well as mechanical or electrical phenomena. Carolyn Marvin regards them as ‘constructed complexes of habits, beliefs, and procedures embedded in elaborate cultural codes of communication’.⁷ As such they are sources of social, cultural, political and even economic tension, embodying the potential to jeopardise what she calls the ‘accustomed orders’, be they cultural or political.⁸ The rapid utilisation and popularity of new media such as cinema, the telephone and the phonograph, along with further advances in printing and publishing technologies during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, produced controversy over their impact on culture and society, especially their consequences for behaviour and social values. As Eamonn Carrabine observes

worries over the harmful effects of popular culture has been a recurring theme since at least the sixteenth century....Each development in media technology has been accompanied by much alarm over the dire consequences of exposure to this or that medium. From the earliest days of the printing press to cyberspace chat rooms there have been persistent concerns raised over the criminogenic effects of the media.⁹

Similar concerns over comics were exacerbated by the medium’s ready availability and relative cheapness, as well as their appeal to a range of ages. In debating comics, especially in the guise of American comics, New Zealanders were participating in a dialogue about popular media that had existed for half a millennium.

II

The designation ‘comics’, along with its companion labels ‘pulp magazines’ and ‘pulp’ were the metonyms of choice that New Zealanders used to signify both America and its culture. As the Inspector of Schools observed in 1949, ‘[t]he term “comic” ... covers a multitude of publications of widely varying types’.¹⁰ ‘Comics’ included syndicated comic strips such as *Dagwood and Blondie*, which were devoted to the adventures of humorous escapades of a particular character or family or group. It also meant compendiums of strips about various comic or action characters ranging from Donald Duck to Buck Rogers, along with illustrated panels

⁶ Kernan, *Printing Technology*, p.15

⁷ Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.8

⁸ Marvin, *Technologies*, p.8

⁹ Eamonn Carrabine, *Crime, Culture and the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), p.9

¹⁰ Memorandum from Inspector of Schools to Acting Director of Education, 11 May 1949, E2 11/1/16, Box 683, p.2, Archives New Zealand, (ANZ) Wellington

which incorporated a serial narrative, like *The Phantom*. Local opponents of American comics deliberately conflated the term so that it included a range of adult literature regarded as ‘unrespectable’ and ‘lower-class’, inimical to bourgeois values. These included ‘Male’ magazines, with collections of ‘adult’ jokes, cartoons, and pin-up pictures.¹¹ This conflation of the label ‘comics’ is well illustrated by a 1951 *People’s Voice* editorial cartoon. One panel claims that as part of a Wall Street campaign of

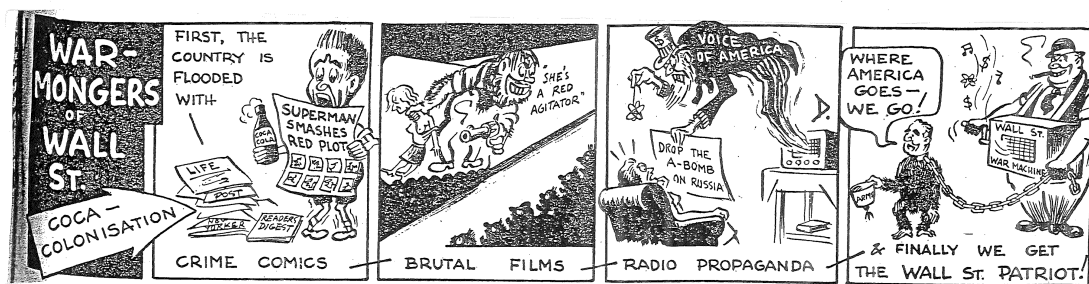


Figure 7 The *People’s Voice* on American culture¹²

‘coca-colonisation’, New Zealand ‘is flooded with crime comics’. Within this description fall American magazines and journals such as the *Readers’ Digest*, *Life* and the *New Yorker*, as well as *Superman* comics. Anti-comic discourses also incorporated within the vague rubric of ‘comics’ those adult paperbacks depicting the salacious and violent exploits of an unsavoury underworld. ‘Comics’ also subsumed pulp magazines: garishly covered publications of short fiction, usually about crime, romance, science fiction, or the ‘wild west’. Some ‘comics’ essentially consisted of paneled illustrations with little vocabulary; others contained one or two pictures amidst several hundred words.

Most New Zealand critiques of ‘comics’ and ‘pulp’ unhesitatingly identified ‘comics’ as specifically American in origin and content, although many of them were Australian or British. ‘Go now to any New Zealand bookstall,’ claimed an article in *New Zealand Libraries*, ‘examine any child’s treasured piles of comics, and you’ll find predominating over all others is the American comic, with American slang, with American slants on life and living....’¹³ Like their metonymic counterparts, ‘swing’ and ‘movies’, ‘comics’ were located within an easily identifiable American context.

¹¹ Deftly defined in a March, 1952 Wellington College survey of students’ reading habits as ‘Pictures and Jokes of Dubious Quality’. ‘Notes on Periodical-reading of 2nd and 4th year boys’, Wellington College, 6 March, 1952, p.2, E2 11/1/16, Box 683, ANZ.

¹² ‘War-Mongers of Wall St.’, *People’s Voice*, 21 February 1951, p.5

¹³ *New Zealand Libraries*, September 1945, p.142

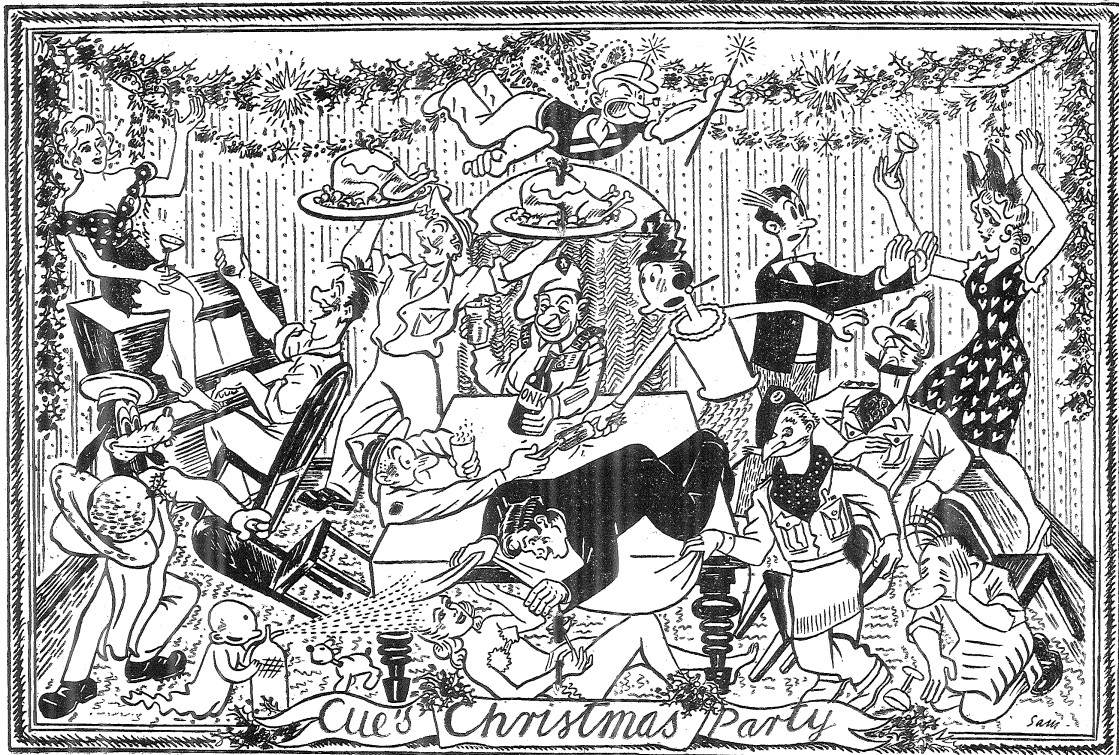


Figure 8 *Cue's* Christmas Cartoon, 1944. Note the predominance of figures from U.S. comics and comic strips

The ubiquity and the popularity of American comic /comicstrip characters with new Zealanders in the 1940s is demonstrated in the Christmas 1944 issue of the Armed Forces' magazine *Cue*. The cartoonist depicts a boozy Christmas party featuring a number of comics-based 'personalities' celebrating with New Zealand servicemen. Of the ten characters depicted, nine come from American comics or comic-strips: Li'l Abner, Popeye, Dagwood, Goofy, Daisy Mae etc. Interestingly, the only identifiable British comic identity is also the only one in the group who possessed overtly sexual overtones. That is 'Jane', from the eponymous *Daily Mirror* comic strip, who was famous for losing her dignity and most of her clothing during her humorous adventures.¹⁴

In 1952 *Here & Now* referred to 'a steady diet of American-style comics....comic-strip propaganda for the American gangster's way of life....'¹⁵ It referred to comics using the context of American slang – 'the flat-nosed thugs, the drug-peddlers, the sexy dames, the trigger-happy guys'.¹⁶ Bill Pearson, in deploring the alleged impact of comics on children, also used American slang to identify that medium's source as America: '“Gee,

¹⁴ *Cue*, No.1, December 1944, pp.16-17

¹⁵ *Here & Now*, July 1952, p. 21

¹⁶ *Here & Now*, July 1952, p. 2

honey, with you and my gun I can get anything in the world”’.¹⁷ The *People’s Voice* insisted on the maleficent association of comics with America, describing them as ‘the Yanks’ over-size dope sheets’.¹⁸ When it reported that ‘nearly 200’ people met in Wellington in August 1952 to discuss controls on comics, it claimed that ‘[a]lmost all who spoke referred to the U.S.A. as being responsible for the worst of these “cahmics” which are flooding New Zealand.’¹⁹

Such critics also conflated American comics with movies and music in their discussions of that culture. Thus Pearson linked ‘Hollywood, the ZB stations, the gutter press and the American-style comics that our children and jockeys read’ in a media mélange that he accused of ‘ushering in a period of decadence’.²⁰ An article in the Marxist journal *New Zealand Labour Review* issued a blanket condemnation of American culture, denouncing the ‘importation of [American] comics, pulp magazines and novels, films of sadism and sex, and slushy songs.’²¹ The journal *New Zealand Libraries* bluntly claimed ‘there is no subtlety about the [American] comic. Their values are as pernicious as those of Hollywood. They are wealth and luck, physical strength, ruthless and daring – toughness in a word.’²²

During the midcentury, American music and American cinema were both praised and condemned by some New Zealanders for their perceived modernity, brashness and innovatory spirit. Comics were similarly represented as exhibiting such qualities, frequently identified as specifically ‘American’. For their opponents, the medium exemplified those popular cultural forms associated with American ‘mass’ media: inherently shallow and frivolous, harbingers of artistic and ethical degeneracy. Pulp and comics were also regarded as inimical to improved literacy and educational achievement. Like the cinema and jazz, comics and pulp magazines were accused of containing immoral content deleterious not only to the young, but also to those sections of the adult population adjudged incapable of appreciating the dangers that these new literary, musical and artistic approaches presented to conventional cultural and civic values.

¹⁷ *Landfall*, Vol. 9, No.1, (March 1955), p.95

¹⁸ *People’s Voice*, 20 February 1952, p.5

¹⁹ *People’s Voice*, 20 August 1952, p.4

²⁰ Bill Pearson, ‘Fretful Sleepers: a Sketch of New Zealand Behaviour and Its Implications for the Artist’, *Landfall*, Vol.6, No.3 (September 1952), p. 225

²¹ George Broad, ‘Youth in the People’s Movement’, *New Zealand Labour Review* November 1951, p.11

²² ‘What Should I Give Him To Read? A Parent’s Notes’, *New Zealand Libraries*, December 1945, p.217

III

In New Zealand, as overseas, responses to American comics did not begin abruptly with the comics 'scare' of the early 1950s. Amy Nyberg has noted that in America itself '[m]any of the criticisms levelled against the comics were echoes of earlier attacks on dime novels, film, and radio.'²³ As John Lent observes in his study of the international context of this phenomenon, 'the comic book controversy already had a full head of steam' before the late forties.²⁴ Roger Openshaw maintains that 'the 1930s saw increasing alarm in New Zealand over some types of comics, chiefly of American origin, which were disparagingly referred to as "cahmics"'.²⁵

However, this local consternation was directed not so much against comics as against what Maxwell Fernie,²⁶ a leading figure in postwar Wellington's cultural establishment, called 'the notorious "pulp magazines" which a few years ago threatened to flood the Dominion'.²⁷ These magazines were allegedly imported from the United States.²⁸ In 1934 *Truth* published an article attacking such publications as 'indecent'. The next year the National Council of Women and the Mothers' Union condemned them.²⁹ By 1938 educational and religious groups were complaining about 'pulp literature'; described by the Wellington Technical College's Board of Governors as a 'menace'.³⁰ In July, responding to such concerns, a meeting of booksellers, librarians and importers, chaired by the Minister of Customs, resulted in importers of magazines voluntarily agreeing not to import those which 'gave undue prominence to matters of sex, obscenity, horror, crime and

²³ Amy Nyberg, 'Comic Book Censorship in the United States' in Lent, John A., ed, *Pulp Demons: International Dimensions of the Postwar Anti-Comics Campaign* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), p.42

²⁴ Lent, 'Comics Debates', p.16. Henry E. Schulz has shown that concerns about comic books were being voiced in the early 1940s in the U.S.A. He documented at least sixty-four pre-1947 citations about issues associated with comics, ranging from psychology journals to *Time*. Most titles indicate concern about comics' alleged effects. Henry E. Schultz, 'Censorship or Self-Regulation?' *Journal of Educational Sociology* Vol. 23, No.4 (December 1949), pp. 215-224; Lent, 'Comics Debates', p.11

²⁵ Roger Openshaw, "'The Glare of Broadway": Some New Zealand Reactions to the Perceived Americanisation of Youth', *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, Vol.10 No.1 (July 1991), p.51

²⁶ See previous chapter for Fernie's view on music.

²⁷ Maxwell Fernie, 'Basis of N.Z. Musical Culture', *Cue*, No.4 (1944), pp.17-18

²⁸ A similar campaign, directed against American crime comics, had been launched in the 1920s in Canada. It employed terms such as 'Objectionable Literature' and 'Pernicious Literature'; these were to become staples of the anti-comics campaign in postwar New Zealand. Jonathan Swaininger, 'American Crime Comics as Villains: an Incident From Northwest Canada', *Legal Studies Forum*, Vol.22, pp.215-222, footnote 2, p.216

²⁹ NC1/24/43/107 Memo.20/6/38, Archives New Zealand (ANZ), Wellington, cited A.C. Burns, 'Some Aspects of Censorship: a Survey of Censorship Law and Practice in New Zealand From 1841 to 1963, Mainly Concerning the Control of Indecent Publications', M.A. Thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1968, p.74

³⁰ *Evening Post*, 1 March 1938, p.8

cruelty’.³¹ This occurred at a time when Australian state and federal governments were amending legislation to extend the definition of what constituted an obscene publication.³² As A.C. Burns noted, the new local regulations were ‘a response to the new ‘pulp literature’ from America.’³³

Contention about American comics and pulp magazines gained fresh impetus during and after the war. ‘If later commentators are to be believed’, claimed Roger Openshaw and Roy Shuker, ‘the arrival of American troops provided the spark which rekindled public concern’.³⁴ These concerns lacked probative force. They consisted of unsubstantiated assertions and hearsay evidence. Elsie Locke spoke of an ‘avalanche’ of ‘half a billion’ American comics with their ‘habit-forming’ effects.³⁵ Claims that these comics were available, free, in massive numbers for the U.S. military, who then distributed them to New Zealanders, were false. Wartime American paper restrictions in fact limited the number of comics that could be printed. An investigation of audited circulation figures for 1943 also reveal that U.S. comic publishers’ sales to the War Department PXs were relatively insignificant. Furthermore, while the U.S. government sponsored a free paperback programme – including literary classics - there was no such subsidy of comics.³⁶ Severe local restrictions on newsprint, which remained in force until the early 1950s, also made the production of multitudes of New Zealand copies from imported templates impossible.³⁷

Most of the so-called crime ‘cahmics’ that appeared in New Zealand during the 1939-56 period were not American imports at all, nor were they aimed at children. They were Australian authored and published pulp fiction in flimsy magazine or paperback format, mainly crime and detective stories, sometimes with American settings. The most popular of the crime genre were the Carter Brown, and Larry Kent series, and those written

³¹ C1/24/43/107 Memo 25/7/38, ANZ, cited Burns, ‘Some Aspects’, p.75

³² Burns, ‘Some Aspects’, pp.74-75

³³ Burns, ‘Some Aspects’, p.76

³⁴ Roger Openshaw and Roy Shuker, “‘Worthless and Indecent Literature’: Comics and Moral Panic in Early Post-War New Zealand”, in Openshaw et al, *Youth, Media and Moral Panic in New Zealand (From Hooligans to Video Nasties)* (Palmerston North: Dept of Education, Massey University, Delta Research Monograph No.11, 1990), p.84

³⁵ Elsie Locke, ‘Crime Comics – Outlet or Incitement?’, *kListener*, 3 September 1954, p.8

³⁶ For example, in 1943, a note attached to the U.S. Audit Bureau of Circulation’s statistics for the National Comics group, one of the major comics publishers, reads ‘Net single copy sales to Men in Service averaging 3.261 copies per group (per month), representing copies sold to the War Department’. Grand Comics Database Audit Bureau of Circulation’, < <http://www.hoboes.com/pub/Comics/About%20Comics/Business/Top%20Comics%20and%20Publishers/Comic%20Book%20Circulation%20Data> > (accessed 20 July, 2009); Mark Carlsson, ‘Funny Business: a History of the Comics Industry’, *The Nostalgia Zone* Vol. 1, No.1, 2005, <<http://www.nostalgiazone.com/doc/zine/05/Q1/funnybusiness.htm> >, all accessed 10 May, 2010

³⁷ Openshaw and Shuker, “‘Worthless and Indecent’”, p. 85

by Marc Brody, an Australian journalist and editor.³⁸ These publications came from Sydney publishing houses such as Horwitz Publications, which took advantage of a virtual monopoly situation, the result of a federal ban on the import of U.S. pulps which lasted from 1939 to 1959. Some of these firms paid for syndication rights to U.S. material and redrew or otherwise altered the originals to give them an antipodean flavour.³⁹ At its peak, Horwitz alone published forty-eight comics and twenty-four fiction titles each month. Tania Johnson-Wood has described these years as ‘the golden days of cheap Australian fiction’.⁴⁰ The removal of paper restrictions after the war meant that by 1950, Australian ‘bookstands groaned under the weight of locally written and produced ... pulp fiction’. By 1951, there were no restrictions on the importation of comics from Australia apart from the significant requirement that they comply with New Zealand’s Indecent Publications Act, 1910.⁴¹ Consequently, many of these Australian titles were distributed in New Zealand, ‘eagerly devoured by local readers’.⁴² However, as Donald Kerr makes clear, these were essentially Australian Pulps, some with ‘American’ settings, written and drawn by Australians, primarily for an antipodean market.⁴³

In order to mollify Australasian critics of comics, many of these Australian publishing and distributing firms like Horwitz established censorship committees, and set up codes of ethics and parent advisory groups in the early fifties. For example, the Horwitz

³⁸ The Larry Kent titles, costing one shilling (10 cents) each in the 1950s, were based on a popular Sydney radio series created in 1950 by Ron Ingleby. Most of the Carter Brown titles were the work of a QANTAS employee, Alan Yates, an Englishman resident in Australia. Publication began in September, 1951. Yates worked from home and wrote one novel a fortnight. ‘Larry Kent’, National Library of Australia catalogue <<http://catalogue.nla.gov.au/Record/231875>>; ‘Crime Fiction Collection’, University of Adelaide, <<http://www.adelaide.edu.au/library/special/exhibit/crime/>>; Toni Johnson-Woods, The Mysterious Case of Carter Brown: Or, Who Really Killed the Australian Author? [online]. *Australian Literary Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 2004: 74-88, esp. pp.74-6; ‘Larry Kent’, <<http://www.thrillingdetective.com/eyes/kent.html>>; Graeme Flanagan, ‘Hardboiled Pulp’, University of Queensland, <http://www.uq.edu.au/~entjohns/Hardboiled_Pulp.html>; ‘History of Australian Comics’, <<http://hayase.net.au/wiki/index.php.title=History-of-Australian-Comics>>; The Pulp Fiction Exhibition, Otago University, <http://library.otago.ac.nz/exhibitions/pulp_fiction/> All above sources accessed 10-14 May, 2010

³⁹ Peter Coleman, ‘The Comics Business’, *The Observer*, December 1960, Vol. 3, No. 25, in ‘Comics Down Under’, <<http://comicsdownunder.blogspot.com/2007/11/australian-comics-1960-snapshot.html>> accessed 11 May 2010

⁴⁰ W.F. Connell, *Growing Up in an Australian City: a Study of Adolescents in Sydney* (Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research, 1957), p.155

⁴¹ Comptroller of Customs to H.J. Watts, Minister I/C Import Licensing, 9 /11/1951, ANZ: E2 Box 683 11/1/16

⁴² Donald Kerr, ‘The Pulp Fiction Exhibition Handlist’, <http://library.otago.ac.nz/exhibitions/pulp_fiction/pulp-handlist.pdf> This fine online exhibit contains excellent explanatory essays and images of hundreds of Australian pulp fiction magazines, accessed 15 October 2010

⁴³ Kerr, ‘Pulp Fiction Exhibition Handlist’ Action Comics published nothing but Australian material; the smaller Invincible Press published a mix of Australian, British and American authors. ‘The Pulp Fiction Exhibition’, <http://library.otago.ac.nz/exhibitions/pulp_fiction/>

code mandated that in all juvenile comics the characters' motives 'must emphasise high social, civic and national ideals; physical fitness, learning and moral integrity must be exemplified; respect for authority must be instilled at every opportunity'. No sexual references were permitted and at all times females had to be 'properly clothed'. Gordon & Gotch, the largest distributor of comics in both Australia and New Zealand, even set up a panel to censor what the publishers' censors had passed.⁴⁴ This may explain why the promised excitements of the lurid covers never eventuated within the contents. As with radio drama, Australians had appropriated an American cultural form and altered it to suit the local audience. The products of this Australian literary hybrid constituted the mass of the so-called American inundation of comics into New Zealand. Some New Zealand publishers in turn attempted to remedy this trans-Tasman cultural imbalance by printing and exporting 'sex magazines' to Australia.⁴⁵

Openshaw and Shuker maintain that concerns about what they call 'comics' but which were in fact predominantly pulps, 'appears to have become significant' by 1945. They locate this concern in complaints to education boards, the Education department and letters to newspapers. Although the Minister of Education, having looked at an offending comic, had remarked that he saw 'nothing to warrant excitement', his Director-General of Education suggested that 'probably a case can be made for cutting off the worst of the comics at their source'.⁴⁶ There is, however, scant evidence that American comics were flooding into New Zealand during the war years, that most were luridly violent or sexual in nature, or that children had easy access to such reprehensible content.

IV

The parameters of the controversy about American comics and pulps, a debate that occupied the first postwar decade, were established even before the war ended. In May 1945 an editorial in the *Christchurch Star-Sun* acknowledged the existence of what it

⁴⁴ The Horwitz code of ethics also established 'no intimacy other than wholesome embrace may be exchanged'. It was recommended that artists not show husband and wife in a bedroom. Plots involving divorce were to be avoided. Peter Coleman, *Obscenity, Blasphemy, Sedition: The Rise and Fall of Literary Censorship in Australia* (Sydney: Duff & Snellgrove, 2000), p.204

⁴⁵ These were mainly nudist and 'sun-bathing' magazines, a particular bete-noir of Walter Nash. Augustine Brannigan, 'Crimes From Comics' Social and Political Determinants of Reform of the Victoria Obscenity Law 1938-1954', *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, Vol.19 (March 1986), p.29, 40; Brannigan 'Delinquency, Comics and Legislative Reactions: An Analysis of Obscenity Law Reform in Post-war Canada and Victoria', *Australian-Canadian Studies*, Vol.3 (1985), p.59

⁴⁶ Openshaw and Shuker, "'Worthless and Indecent', p. 84

called a 'Vogue of Comics'. It unhesitatingly identified comics as American in origin. 'The comic strip in the daily newspaper, the comic supplements, often brightly coloured, and that host of vivid books that fall under the general heading of "comics" or "funnies"' – all features identifying American comics available locally at that time - 'have usurped the place formerly held in youthful affections by the exaggerated adventure tales that went to the making of the "penny dreadfuls"'. Not only had American-style comics taken over from the British "penny dreadfuls". Their allure, according to the *Star-Sun*, extended beyond children, 'carry[ing] an appeal for all over the age of three. Indeed many of these – as witness the well-loved Mr Jiggs⁴⁷ - are almost entirely for the delectation of adult readers.' The editorial's analysis of comics was unequivocally affirmative. Not only did they contain an 'endless variety of subject matter and infinite variety of method'. They also possessed 'one outstanding merit: virtue always triumphs, villainy is defeated'. The *Star-Sun* concluded of comics:

Few condemn them. For the great majority they provide welcome variation in the daily literary fare. It may be that they will have their day and cease to be, but in the meantime their popularity is growing, and it is an encouraging sign that the quality of most of the strips is steadily improving.⁴⁸

Yet a few weeks later, American comics *were* condemned in a comprehensive attack that anticipated to a remarkable degree the tropes that became the staples of American and global criticism of comics in the late 1940s and early 1950s. This denunciation initially occurred in mid-1945 in an anonymous mid-1945 two-part article, 'Concern Over Comics', in *Korero*, a New Zealand armed forces' periodical.⁴⁹ A month later, excerpts appeared in *National Education*, the journal of the New Zealand Educational Institute, with authorship attributed to Jim Henderson.⁵⁰ In September the original article re-appeared virtually intact as 'Clean Up Comics' in that month's edition of the journal

⁴⁷ A daily comic-strip, sometimes called 'Maggie and Jiggs', and based on the lives of a rotund corned-beef and cabbage loving American husband who prefers the working-class milieu, and his pretentious, socially aspiring wife. The strip was to be found in many New Zealand newspapers of the mid-century.

⁴⁸ 'Vogue of Comics', *Star-Sun*, 26 May 1945, p.6 Later that year the *New Zealand Herald* complained that 'New Zealand youngsters' were developing 'a taste for 'American comics and the jargon of the Chicago underworld'. As an antidote it urged a literary diet of the British authors Kipling, Marryat, Henty and Ballantyne. 'Books for Boys', *Herald*, 14 November, 1945 p.4

⁴⁹ 'Concern Over Comics: A *Korero* Report', Part I, *Korero*, Vol.3 No.11 (2 July 1945), pp.7-10; Part II, Vol.3, No.12, (16 July 1945), pp. 9-11

⁵⁰ Jim Henderson (1918 - 2005) was a journalist before serving as a gunner with the 2nd NZEF in the North African campaign. Wounded and taken prisoner at Sidi Rezegh in 1941, his left leg had to be amputated while in a POW camp. Repatriated to New Zealand in 1943, he wrote *Gunners Inglorious*, a vivid account of his war experiences. Henderson went on to become the host of the popular rural radio series *Open Country*. RSA News - Jim Henderson Dies -13 July 2005

<http://www.rsa.org.nz/about/nws2005jul/jim_henderson_obit.htm>, accessed 26 February 2010

New Zealand Libraries. These articles constituted a cultural template outlining many of the arguments adopted by New Zealand opponents of American comics and pulp magazines. Fundamental to Henderson's critique was his identification of American comics as malignant and addictive, as well as his careful exemption of British comics from such denunciations. Henderson described U.S. comics as 'alien (or alien in thought and atmosphere)'. He also claimed they were readily available in Wellington shops, a surprising assertion in view of the severe impact of current import and shipping restrictions, and the wartime scarcities of paper.⁵¹ Henderson cited comments from American and New Zealand 'educationists' in his attempts to prove that American comics had a deleterious effect on the behaviour and literacy of children. He also maintained that New Zealand readers of these comics were consuming a cultural diet over-laden with American customs, commercialism, language, and values. Furthermore, such comics were not only shoddy culturally and morally, but tawdry and vulgar in their artwork and presentation.⁵²

V

The fundamentals of Henderson's critique of comics achieved a more academic expression with the publication in 1947 of W.J. Scott's *Reading, Film & Radio Tastes of High School Boys and Girls* by the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. This included a survey of New Zealand adolescents' reading habits and preferences.⁵³ Scott's idiosyncratic and inconsistent classification of reading categories meant that he only occasionally used the terms 'comics' and 'pulp magazines'. Instead they were usually subsumed under such vague headings as 'fiction magazines', 'thriller and romantic' and 'humorous'.⁵⁴ Occasionally he identified specifically American titles or categories: '[t]he gossipy film magazines, *True Story* and its numerous companions and the pulps....'⁵⁵ However, when he discussed 'comics-strips', he identified them specifically as an

⁵¹ See W.J. Scott, *Reading, Film & Radio Tastes of High School Boys and Girls* (Wellington: New Zealand Council for Education Research, 1947), p.102. During the 1954 parliamentary debate about comics, several Labour M.P.s claimed that import restrictions had throttled the supply of overseas comics at that time.

⁵² Henderson, 'Concern Over Comics', 2 July 1945, p.10

⁵³ This survey was based on a questionnaire of nearly 5000 students from nineteen high schools during 1942.

⁵⁴ e.g. Scott, *Tastes*, Table XIII, 'Distribution of Readings Among Types of Magazines', pp.88-9

⁵⁵ Scott, *Tastes*, p.102

American genre. This included the claim that '[m]ore Americans read comic strips than any other form of literature'.⁵⁶

At the time Scott carried out his survey, he was lecturer in English at Wellington Teachers' Training College, well known for his articles on teaching English and a member of a committee revising primary English syllabi.⁵⁷ Scott's lectures were innovatory and influential, for he not only introduced the study of mass media and its impact on children's learning into New Zealand; he also insisted that local authors were worthy of inclusion in the study and teaching of English literature. He was also a person of strong left-wing views who regarded capitalism as a threat to cultural values.⁵⁸ Scott's attitudes towards literary culture had a great influence on official attitudes towards the role and teaching of English and popular culture in postwar curricula. He played many educational and public roles from the late forties through the mid-sixties. Scott was lecturer, vice-principal and later principal of Wellington Teachers' College. He also became a member of the Victoria University Council and wrote Schools Publications' booklets on English and media.⁵⁹ Thus he had ideal platforms to influence hundreds of teacher graduates, some of whom went on to become principals, departmental officials and members of the rising class of academic 'educationists'. Furthermore, during the early fifties Scott acted as mentor for several authors who would later become prominent on the New Zealand literary scene, including James K. Baxter, Alistair Campbell and Louis Johnson.⁶⁰

Scott's Anglophile and elitist literary and cultural attitudes were therefore broadcast to a wide and influential audience for several decades in New Zealand in an era when American cultural influences were increasingly pervasive and elitist cultural attitudes were increasingly questioned overseas. For all his frequently professed social and political radicalism,⁶¹ Scott's stance on culture aligned him with the interwar English cultural conservatives, such as F.R. and Q.D. Leavis and T.S. Eliot, who insisted that popular culture in all its forms represented the very antipode of what culture should be and that

⁵⁶ Scott, *Tastes*, pp.98-9

⁵⁷ Scott remarked that during his brief period as a school teacher he found 'working with students who are above average to superior intelligence ... endlessly interesting.' It is significant that he did not mention his attitude to those who fell below this level. John Shallcrass, *W.J. Scott and the Liberal Tradition* (Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1965). p.5

⁵⁸ William Renwick, 'Scott, Walter James 1902-1985', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007, <<http://dnzb.govt.nz>>, accessed 22 April 2008

⁵⁹ Victoria University of Wellington's College of Education Library is named after Scott.

⁶⁰ Renwick, 'Scott', p.9

⁶¹ e.g. Scott's declaration that 'a teacher must be involved in the welfare of the society he lives in. And he must help to ensure that the democratic principles that he is required to teach – and he is required to teach them – are embodied and expressed in the practices of society itself.' Shallcrass, *Scott*, p.9

literary and cultural worth must be measured against fixed aesthetic standards.⁶² He claimed that he underwent ‘a sort of conversion about 1930 ...largely through the influence of Dr. and Mrs F.R. Leavis’ which turned him away from his cultural sins such as reading Hopalong Cassidy books.⁶³ Scott’s religious phraseology was significant. Like several other public intellectuals of the era, such as Gordon Mirams, Bill Pearson and Elsie Locke, Scott was determined to replace the ungodly habits of a benighted populace with civilised and righteous values.⁶⁴

The Leavisite gospel preached by Scott constituted the dominant critical approach to popular culture for decades, an approach at once ‘self-consciously conservative and elitist’.⁶⁵ The Leavisites maintained that the new forms of ‘mass’ culture, the product of industrial capitalism, along with the extension of the franchise to a working class they regarded as culturally illiterate, threatened civilised values as well as political and social instability. Artists kept ‘high’ culture’s flame alight, thereby preserving the higher spiritual values.⁶⁶ Leavis insisted the cultural and educational elite must ensure the public became enfranchised *culturally* as well as politically. In books such as *Culture and Environment* he codified several fundamental assertions about popular media in all its forms in an age of technology. He argued that such media made culture a standardised, mechanical process. They also actively sought the lowest common cultural denominator, and became a soporific for the masses. *Fiction and the Reading Public* compared the reading tastes of the British masses with ‘a form of the drug habit’ promoted by commercial interests.

Scott enthusiastically adopted these tropes in his *Survey*.⁶⁷ He followed Leavis in believing that the pervasive evils of ‘popular’ culture necessitated what Chinitz describes as the ‘requisite vigilance of the besieged minority who maintain the vitality of the culture against the tide of general decline’.⁶⁸ From this perspective, ‘proper’ culture, be it literature, music or the visual arts, was capable of being appreciated only by an educated

⁶² Eamonn Carrabine, *Crime, Culture and the Media* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008), p.31-2

⁶³ Shallcrass, *Scott*, p.9

⁶⁴ Their attitudes resembled those of late nineteenth century New England cultural critics, such as Charles Eliot Norton and James Russell Lowell, who described their role as ‘public instructor’ and ‘a kind of priesthood’. Cited in Michael Kammen. *American Culture American Tastes: Social Change and the Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1999), p142

⁶⁵ Carrabine, *Crime, Culture*, p.32; David Chinitz, *T.S. Eliot and the Cultural Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p.153

⁶⁶ David Inglis and John Hughson. *Confronting Culture: Sociological Visions* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), p.92

⁶⁷ Q.D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965 reprint of 1932 edition), p.7; 22

⁶⁸ Chinitz, *T.S. Eliot*, p.153

elite. Scott's condemnations of mass culture in its American form - as exemplified by that nation's comics and pulps, as well as its music and cinema - shared the elitist conclusions of the Leavises, the Frankfurt school and later Dwight Macdonald, that such cultural artifacts were at best anodyne palliatives and at worse narcotics, manufactured by commercial interests in order to distract and sedate the masses.

Scott's survey of reading tastes was underwritten by Leavis's insistence that there was a dichotomy of cultural values, with the texts of popular and inferior literary culture, such as comics, confronting those of a superior literature, exemplified by what Scott fondly termed 'the classics', such as Shakespeare, Austen and George Eliot.⁶⁹ Indeed, shortly before his inquiry was published, Scott declared that he feared the 'lower forms of literature and journalism ...[[would] completely devour the higher', a reiteration of the alarm expressed throughout the pages of *Fiction and the Reading Public*.⁷⁰ Mass education meant that the twentieth century New Zealand and British general public could now read, but could not appreciate that what they were reading was literary ordure.⁷¹ Scott's NZCER study assumed that there was a normal distribution curve of intelligence and cultural knowledge in the community at large. Accordingly the New Zealand public,

if grouped according to individual endowment, form a huge diamond, with the *elite*, those most able to assimilate and transmit the best ideas and ideals, at the top, the dullest and least useful at the bottom, and a great mass of average folk arranged in the degrees of their gifts at and towards the middle.⁷²

Scott insisted that the 'mass producers' of modern cultural products, like comics, seek to maximise their profits by dealing with 'the huge middle portion'. Thus the culture that they offered must 'be expressed in a simple form that is intelligible and entertaining to them'. It was not in the mass producers' commercial interests to be concerned about the tastes of the elite, although 'this highly educated and educable group' might find such cultural pabulum entertaining, 'if presented with sufficient subtlety'. However, Scott argued that these producers aimed to devalue the more elevated cultural tastes of the elite, in order to

⁶⁹ When the author C.K. Stead was at high school in the 1940s, his School Certificate (Year 11) reading list for English included 'Dickens, Sir Walter Scott, Jane Austen, George Eliot, Wilkie Collins, Conan Doyle, R.L. Stevenson, Rider Haggard, John Buchan, H.G. Wells, Swift, Defoe, Charlotte Bronte, Mark Twain, G.B. Shaw and Oliver Goldsmith.... what a language-loam for the developing mind.... along with Shakespeare and the major British poets...' C.K. Stead, *South-West of Eden: Memoirs 1932-1956* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1956), p.197. Only one American author is listed.

⁷⁰ W.J. Scott, 'Am I My Brother's Keeper?', *New Zealand Libraries*, Vol.8, No.6 (July 1945), p.106

⁷¹ e.g. see Q.D. Leavis, *Fiction*, p.231

⁷² Scott, *Tastes*, pp.37-8 Emphasis in original.

‘incorporate the depreciation as an element of appeal into the popular culture and use it to strengthen and confirm the tastes of the mass’.⁷³

One result of such devaluation, Scott maintained, was that words like ‘intellectual’ and ‘intelligentsia’ had become tainted with negative ‘emotional associations’ for the public. Unfortunately, this undermined ‘the authority of the *elite* in establishing and maintaining standards of taste in the community’. He maintained that when universal education was introduced, the ‘apostles of an educated democracy’ had hoped that the ‘richest fruits of English and European culture, hitherto enjoyed by a privileged few, would be eagerly seized and assimilated by all classes of the people.’ But the producers of mass media had, by giving the public ‘what it wants’, created ‘a mass taste at level very much below the best’. Thus for Scott, the ‘heavy downwards pressure of our commercialised culture’ was a process of compression which removed the traces of high culture, leaving an unedifying and unhealthy detritus.⁷⁴ His exegesis of the reading habits revealed by the survey further elaborated these Leavisite views. Scott insisted that two cultural nations co-exist within New Zealand secondary schools. On the one hand, there were ‘pupils of poor or only average endowments, brought up in aesthetically drab and bookless homes.’ He adjudged this group had achieved literary improvement when they eventually read adventure novels by British authors like John Buchan rather than pulps or comics. Achieving that level ‘represents as fine a success culturally as to get bright fifth-formers from good homes reveling in classic after classic’.⁷⁵

At the conclusion of his survey, Scott endorsed the views of the English historian G.M. Trevelyan, who claimed that the modern system of education had ‘produced a vast population able to read but unable to distinguish what is worth reading, an easy prey to sensations and cheap appeals’. He also affirmed Trevelyan’s contention that ‘[t]he small highly educated class no longer sets the standard to the extent that it used to, and tends to adopt the standards of the majority’.⁷⁶ Some months before Scott’s survey was published, he had endorsed that same passage in an article denouncing ‘thrillers’ and ‘detective novels’. He insisted that there was ‘no doubt what the responsibility of the educated person is...’ It consisted of upholding traditional standards of what constituted ‘good’ literature.

⁷³ Scott, *Tastes*, pp.37-8

⁷⁴ Scott, *Tastes*, pp.38-40

⁷⁵ Scott, *Tastes*, p.36

⁷⁶ Scott, *Tastes*, pp.199-200. The citation is from Trevelyan’s *English Social History*, 1944 ed., (other details unknown), p. 582

⁷⁷ Librarians, for example were ‘their brother’s keeper’; their duty was to cease ‘reading, buying, stocking and lending detective novels’.⁷⁸

Scott claimed that ‘educated persons’ must stamp out not just ‘thrillers’, but also comics and pulps, in order to preserve an acceptable level of literary and cultural purity. His argument not only followed from F.R. Leavis’s stern insistence that all literature must be informed by a moral purpose. It was also a consequence of the Q.D. Leavis’s contention that a cultural-intellectual elite must take the lead in fighting the evils of popular reading media such as pulps and comics. That battle, she enjoined, must be waged by a ‘picked few’ and ‘take the form of resistance by an armed and conscious minority’. The crucial battleground would be the schools and universities; the vital weapon for this resistance would be educating youth in ‘the training of taste’.⁷⁹ Scott championed this view, repeatedly emphasising the crucial role of teachers in New Zealand’s cultural inspectorate.

No parent or teacher should regard a confirmed taste for these juvenile magazines as desirable or even harmless.... “harmless” has become a characteristic defensive term used frequently by the educated themselves to excuse an inferior taste.⁸⁰

As such, they must be vigilant against ‘compromising with standards’, for ‘teachers as filmgoers, readers and radio-listeners, are individually being constantly subjected to the temptation to lower their own standards’. Should they for example, ‘find themselves enjoying *Mrs Miniver*, *A Song to Remember* and *Gone With the Wind* more than *Tintern Abbey* and *Macbeth*, they must inevitably lose some of their power to infect their readers with an enthusiasm for the best books.’ Accordingly, he reproved those teachers who have ‘already accepted the light novel, film, or magazine as a pleasant and legitimate relaxation for themselves after the strenuous work of teaching literature of good quality in the classroom’.⁸¹

Scott also asserted that comics and pulps, along with movies and music, were distributed to the young as a form of cultural fix by ‘enterprising men of business, who, having discovered that it is very profitable to sell culture to the masses, have invested immense sums of money in the extensive concerns that manufacture and distribute it.’⁸² These producers had a sinister ‘larger plan’: ‘[t]o make the large juvenile and adolescent

⁷⁷ W.J. Scott, ‘Am I My Brother’s Keeper? *New Zealand Libraries*, July 1945, Vol.8, No.6, p.106

⁷⁸ Scott, ‘Brother’s Keeper?’ p.106

⁷⁹ Leavis, *Fiction*, pp.270-1

⁸⁰ Scott, *Tastes*, p. 82

⁸¹ Scott, *Tastes*, pp. 41-2. Scott would have been horrified to learn that one of C.K. Stead’s high school teachers not only handed out *Classics Illustrated* comics to his pupils, but also took his class to see Hitchcock and Bogart films. Stead, *South-West of Eden*, p.146

⁸² Scott, *Tastes*, p.37

population of the cities and towns willing consumers of his mass-produced entertainment....⁸³ They provide not only children but also adults with cultural opiates, thereby satisfying a public demand which was ‘created not by giving the public what it wants but by skillfully making it want what it is given’.⁸⁴

Scott condemned comics and pulps for disseminating a ‘patently false’ representation of human motives and behaviour. This forced the reader into a dual existence, ‘using a part of his energy in an excessive emotional participation in a life of fantasy at a time when he needs so much to understand and grapple with the real world’.⁸⁵ In order to improve the reading skills of what he termed ‘backwards readers’, Scott proposed that their ability to access comics and pulp magazines be removed. Their reading regimen should consist of non-fiction that would not unduly stimulate those reader’s imaginative faculties, as well as ‘articles in magazines that will help him develop any hobby he has, or from the specially prepared book or journal ...[which] supplies matter of a better quality, more closely related to the concrete concerns of the reader’s daily life’.⁸⁶ The Auckland author and academic Bill Pearson shared Scott’s disdain for vicarious experience and emotional ‘escape’. Pearson sternly insisted that in both literature and life ‘fantasy and self-indulgence were to be rejected and to discover reality was not only a duty but a challenge’.⁸⁷ For Scott, encouragement of the imaginative faculties of the proletariat was something to be avoided. In this attitude he could be classed as profoundly conservative, indeed reactionary. So could his nostalgia for the English literary traditions of the past.

Even before Scott’s *Survey* was published, the Leavisite foundations of his contentions were already being undermined. In 1934 John Dewey’s seminal *Art as Experience* had warned of the dangers of cultural hagiography, in which ossified ‘classics’ were venerated. ‘When an art product once attains classic status, it somehow becomes isolated from the human conditions under which it was brought into being and from the

⁸³ Scott, *Tastes*, p.41

⁸⁴ Scott, *Tastes*, p.85

⁸⁵ Scott, *Tastes*, p.83

⁸⁶ Scott, *Tastes*, p.84

⁸⁷ Bill Pearson, ‘Beginnings and Endings’, *Sport 5*, (October 1990), p.13. Hence his admiration for the Blackball doctor Stanley Aylward and his wife. ‘It seemed to Pearson’, writes his biographer Paul Millar, ‘that they had learned to live the way he wished he could – rationally and pragmatically, without falling prey to sudden gusts of emotion and feeling’. Dr Aylward was the doctor for the local Miners’ union. He was the model for the impersonal intellectual Marxist Dr. Alexander in Pearson’s *Coal Flat*. Paul Millar, *No Fretful Sleeper: a Life of Bill Pearson*, (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2010), p.99

human consequences it engenders in actual life-experience.’⁸⁸ By the second half of the century, Leavis’s stance was increasingly regarded as a condescending discourse in which popular culture ‘was approached from a distance and gingerly, held out at arm’s length by outsiders who clearly lacked any fondness for or participation in the forms they were studying’.⁸⁹ Like Clement Greenburg and Dwight Macdonald in postwar America, Scott was fighting to perpetuate what Michael Kammen calls the ‘cherished markers’ between cultural boundaries at time when they were becoming increasingly permeable.⁹⁰

Scott’s attitudes towards reading and reading tastes were often condemned. For example, one teacher claimed that Scott’s

Ivory Tower attitude annoys me exceedingly. The trend of a small majority of scholars to belittle and scorn a vast population able to read but unable to distinguish what is worth reading appals me as an epitome of Fascism and is a terrible wish to censor what should be read. From my knowledge of teaching I know it is far better for the child to read anything, comics included, and to get the habit of reading, than to be restrained in any way whatsoever from opening a book.⁹¹

J.I.McDougall described Scott as

giving a Leavis sniff about the reading of the lower class or those who have not enjoyed a Cambridge education in literary taste.... So long as our form of society makes people lead a life of frustration, and endure in their working hours, the major, more important part of their lives, repetitive monotony, the literature of fantasy, of wish-fulfillment, of substitute living will be popular, as films are popular....The advantage of these arts was that they enabled ‘vicarious satisfaction for the pent-up emotions, frustrations and fears which modern society engenders, and which might otherwise find expression in social or political action....’⁹²

These criticisms indicate that by the mid-1950s Scott’s approach to literature seemed increasingly fusty and dogmatic, especially when compared with those of his fellow academics such as H.E. Field, Canterbury’s Professor of Education, and J.C.Reid, a lecturer in English at Auckland University College. In 1954 Field deplored a tendency in the comic strip for ‘the rather cheap exploitation of themes of violence and hate, sex and sentimental love’. However, he concluded that the medium possessed potential ‘as a medium of instruction and entertainment. Some of those in circulation are quite reasonable.’⁹³ Reid, who took a morally conservative stance on cultural and educational

⁸⁸ John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, (New York: Minton, Balch & Co, 1934), p.3

⁸⁹ Tony Bennett, *Popular Culture: Themes and Issues* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1981), p.6, cited Carrabine, *Crime, Culture*, p.32

⁹⁰ Michael Kammen, *American Culture American Tastes: Social Change and the Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1999), p.103

⁹¹ *New Zealand Libraries*, Vol.8, No.8 (September 1945), p.153

⁹² *New Zealand Libraries*, Vol.8, No.8, (September 1945), p.155-6

⁹³ *Star-Sun*, 30 July 1954, p.2

matters, maintained that some American comics had some redeeming literary and social qualities, although he condemned the 'viciousness' and 'lasciviousness' of others.⁹⁴

Yet Scott's negative assessments of comics' educative and cultural value exerted potent clout in primary and secondary educational circles for a quarter of a century. While he deplored what he claimed was the erosion of traditional artistic and literary values and standards caused by modern media, he also sought to mediate or control these new modes of cultural communication. This action he considered to be in the interests of those people he regarded as lacking cultural and intellectual capital.⁹⁵ At the same time he favoured restricting to an educationally privileged minority those cultural expressions that emphasised emotional response.

VI

By the late 1940s the key themes expressed in both Scott's 1947 survey and Henderson's articles were increasingly recycled in New Zealand. In early 1950 the conservative newspaper the *New Zealand Observer* printed an article critical of comics, with sub-headings breathlessly declaring their 'Popularity Among Children in NZ – Wide Vogue With Adults in Australia – Dreadful Example of United States'. The *Observer* asked its readers 'Can NZ escape the craze which has swept the United States and now has a firm hold on Australia? Did you know that in America, no fewer than 100,000,000 people read comics ...every month?' The bulk of the article relied on the testimony of 'a recent American writer, G. Legmann', who had provided 'some astonishing particulars' about the dire effects of comics in the U.S.A. His chief argument was that they featured 'fictional violence', to which their readers, adults as well as children, became 'addicted'.⁹⁶

Legmann's allegation became a staple in New Zealand criticism of comics, employed by anti-comics lobbyists such as Elsie Locke. By the early 1950s such groups, including Scott and the film censor, Gordon Mirams, were organising public meetings to

⁹⁴ J.C.Reid, typed submission to Mazengarb Inquiry, Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL): MS Papers 2384, Folder 08; Ian Richards, *To Bed at Noon: the Life and Art of Maurice Duggan* Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1997), p.109. According to his son, Reid, who took 'deep pleasure in ... cultural vulgarity', arranged for British comics to be mailed to his children, but contrived to read them first. Nicholas Reid, *Après le Deluge, Moi: Letter to My Father From his Youngest Son* in Bill Sewell, ed, *Sons of the Fathers: New Zealand Men Talk About Their Fathers* (Birkenhead: Tandem Press, 1997), pp.101-2

⁹⁵ Scott's approach can also be found in the American progressive movement of the earlier twentieth century. See Paul R. Gorman, *Left Intellectuals and Popular Culture in Twentieth Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pp. 5-9

⁹⁶ 'More Readers for Comic Books', *N.Z. Observer*, 25 January 1950, p.11

discuss comics. Such a meeting was held in Wellington in August 1952, and the groups wanting to participate constitute a master-list of the nation's protective citizens. They included the Catholic Youth Movement, the Council of Educational Research, the New Zealand Educational Institute, the Inter-Church Council of Public Affairs and the National Council of Women.⁹⁷ Many of these lobbyists' accusations relied heavily on American 'evidence' linking comics, especially of the crime and detective genre, with juvenile delinquency. In particular, they, like their counterparts overseas, employed the tropes so forcefully outlined by a New York psychoanalyst, Fredric Wertham. His articles, with titles such 'Horror in the Nursery', originally appeared in American women's and family magazines, and in his 1954 book *Seduction of the Innocent*. His claims that juvenile delinquency was the product of reading crime and horror comics were extensively cited as authoritative in the United States and abroad. Comics, he alleged, created psychological and sexual problems in youth.⁹⁸ Wertham's avowed aim was to 'legislate ...[comics] off the newsstands and out of the candy stores'.⁹⁹ His view of comics embodied a European leftist critique of American popular culture. This insisted that American cultural artifacts embodied a false, exploitive consciousness imposed by a greedy culture industry on its most vulnerable consumers. But Wertham's critics claimed he was a reactionary employing pseudoscientific scare techniques to frighten parents and educationists into believing that their children were being lured into a devious subculture. Some insisted he remained naively unaware of both the ironies and conventions of comic genres, and their readers' abilities to both interpret and distance themselves from these texts.¹⁰⁰ These opponents noted that Wertham and his followers abroad were unable to substantiate their expansive claims with detailed and verifiable evidence. 'Whether comic books caused

⁹⁷ Memo 3798 22 June 1952, Acting-Director of Education to R.M. Algie, Minister of Education, E2 11/1/16 Box 683, ANZ. According to Openshaw, the Education department was 'instructed' to organize a public meeting to discuss the Interdepartmental report and to air public views on future government action.

Openshaw and Shuker, "'Worthless and Indecent'", p.88

⁹⁸ See, for example, Mary L. Adams, 'Youth, Corruptibility, and English-Canadian Postwar Campaigns Against Indecency, 1948-1955' in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol.6 No.1 (July 1995), pp.100-104; William J. Savage, Jr., *Commies, Cowboys, and Jungle Queens: Comic Books and America, 1945 - 1954* (Hanover & London: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), Ch.7; Graeme Osborne, "Comics Discourse in Australia and Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent*" in John A. Lent, ed, *Pulp Demons: International Dimensions of the Postwar Anti-Comics Campaign* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1999), pp.155-178; James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); John A. Lent, "The Comics Debates Internationally: Their Genesis, Issues, and Commonalities" in Lent, *Pulp Demons*, pp.9-41; Amy Nyberg, "Comic Book Censorship in the United States" in Lent, *Pulp Demons*, pp.42-68; Martin Barker: *Comics: Ideology, Power and Politics*, pp.14-15; Kirk Vernedoe and Adam Gopnik, *High & Low: Modern Art & Modern Culture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1991), pp.186-7

⁹⁹ Cited Nyberg, 'Censorship', p.44

¹⁰⁰ Vernedoe and Gopnik, *High & Low*, p.187

juveniles to become delinquent ... was entirely problematical', William Savage concluded.¹⁰¹

New Zealand crusaders against comics wielded Wertham's blunt weapon. These included government minister Hilda Ross on the right and the New Zealand Communist Party on the left.¹⁰² In 1954 one of its members, Elsie Locke, alleged that 'crime comics' were 'freely imported, distributed and read in great quantities' in New Zealand. She also maintained that 'there is a growing conviction that this abnormal "literature" has something to do with abnormal actions'. As proof, she repeated Wertham's false claim that in the U.S. juvenile delinquency had risen by twenty per cent since 1947, 'keeping pace' she argued, with the phenomenal increase in crime comics'.¹⁰³ Other local anti-comics lobbyists reiterated Wertham's argument that comics could 'transform innocent children into psychological monsters', as well as encouraging racist, fascist, sexist and even homosexual attitudes.¹⁰⁴

VII

Some critics of comics, like Scott, regarded all comics as indefensible 'on rational or educational grounds'. To read them was to be guilty of the crime of 'inferior taste'.¹⁰⁵ But others exempted British comics from the strictures they hurled at their American counterparts. Roger Openshaw argues that newspaper editorials contrasted 'the supposedly 'innocuous' English public school adventure stories, with their lack of explicit sexuality and violence and the 'common' American comics ... to the detriment of the American approach.'¹⁰⁶ In 1955 Margaret Dalziel surveyed a range of comics sold in New Zealand

¹⁰¹ '[D]espite claims of Wertham and others, very little systematic research had been carried out on effects [of comics] ... the research available was far from conclusive.' Graeme Osborne, "Comics Discourse in Australia and Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent*" in Lent, *Pulp Demons*, pp.155-178 p.16 Savage also concluded certain comics contained some examples excesses of gratuitous violence and glorification of criminal behaviour. Savage, p.97

¹⁰² E.g. NZPD Vol. 303, (1954), pp. 232-3; 377-9; submission by C.A. Birchfield, New Zealand Communist Party to Mazengarb inquiry, Folder 07, p.1, MS Papers 2384, ANZ

¹⁰³ Elsie Locke, 'Crime Comics – Outlet or Incitement?' *Listener*, 3 September, 1954, p.8' E.g. NZPD 303 (1954), pp. 232-3; 377-9; submission by C.A. Birchfield, p.1

¹⁰⁴ Randy Roberts, 'Wild Delinquents and Misunderstood Rebels', *American History*, Vol.15 No.2 (June 1987), p.327. Wertham alleged in *Seduction of the Innocent* that Batman and Robin were 'psychologically homosexual and that Wonder Woman was the Lesbian counterpart of Batman' Cited William J. Savage, Jr., *Commies, Cowboys, and Jungle Queens: Comic Books and America, 1945 – 1954* (Hanover & London: Wesleyan University Press, 1998), footnote #7, p.140

¹⁰⁵ Scott, *Tastes*, p.82; 86

¹⁰⁶ Roger Openshaw, "'The Glare of Broadway': Some New Zealand Reactions to the Perceived Americanisation of Youth", p.52. Elsewhere Openshaw and Roy Shuker claim that 'British cultural influences were viewed as more desirable'. Openshaw and Shuker, 'Silent Movies' p.54

and concluded that there was indeed an English / American dichotomy. She asserted that 'war, crime and detective, and adventure' comic genres revealed significant differences between American and British comics. For example, the Korean war featured prominently in the American comics, but not in their English counterparts.¹⁰⁷ Dalziel maintained that the

adventure stories in English comics have a very different moral tone from most American stories of the same kind.... A much larger place is given to positive virtues like family affection.... Stories in English comics are more skillfully constructed.¹⁰⁸

Dalziel insisted that not only were English illustrations superior, but that English comics contained more humour. 'And even in stories of crime there is less violence and greater emphasis on skill, co-operation and resourcefulness, in contrast to brute strength.'¹⁰⁹ She also placed many of the differences between these war/adventure comics of the respective nations within context of differing audiences and modes of presentation. '[English] Stories told in the comics' technique have a higher proportion of narrative to picture than American comics. The inference was that they are written for a more literate public'.¹¹⁰

J.C. Reid provided a more nuanced perspective. Not only did he maintain that comics constituted a 'desirable, even a necessary, element in children's reading', he also believed that not all American comics were inferior to their British counterparts. 'Such British comics as *Rainbow*, *Film Fun*, *Radio Fun*, *Jingles* ... and others of the same class are healthy and relaxing reading, if judiciously used. Among the American comics, there are also a good number which are relatively harmless - *Donald Duck*, *Mickey Mouse*, *Hopalong Cassidy*' Reid also endorsed some of the American super-hero comic genre, including *Superman*, *Batman* and *Captain Marvel* – 'although they are fantastic and unreal, the mores exhibited therein are morally sound, and social values are upheld.' However, he deplored 'vicious' American material, such as *War Comics* and *Sheena the Jungle Queen*, for their 'brutal drawings, sordid and cruel incidents, nudity and near-nudity, with lasciviousness of action and dialogue, nightmare figures and falsely romantic views of courtship and marriage.'¹¹¹ Reid particularly objected to pulp fiction, describing it as 'the American-style gangster-story of a particularly low, pornographic kind, and citing the crime stories of Mickey Spillane as 'full of casual fornications, mixed with extreme

¹⁰⁷ Margaret Dalziel, 'Comics in New Zealand', *Landfall*, Vol.9, No.1, (March 1955), p.50

¹⁰⁸ Dalziel, 'Comics', p.52, pp.58-9

¹⁰⁹ Dalziel, 'Comics', p.59

¹¹⁰ Dalziel, 'Comics', p.59

¹¹¹ J.C.Reid, submission to Mazengarb Inquiry, MS Papers 2384, Folder 08, p.4, ATL

brutality and sexual sadism. The values expressed therein are corrupting and anti-social' the characters have no concept of sexual morality; and the detective-'hero' is completely without regard for the ordinary decencies'.¹¹²

During the 1954 parliamentary debate over comics, several Labour M.P.s insisted upon this perceived distinction between the merits of British and American comics, praising the wholesomeness of the former and denounced the depravity of the latter.

Timaru's M.P. Clyde Carr declared that

most of the pernicious literature came from America. English comics did no harm. They were real comics. They entered his own home. But the mental pabulum handed out in truckloads to the Yanks in Korea, the so-called funnies, were a poor comment on the educational standard of their readers.... The problem could be solved by sticking to the English comics, cutting out the Yank funnies, and stopping the Yanks from unloading their trash in New Zealand. That would also save dollars.¹¹³

Mt. Albert's Labour M.P. Warren Freer also exempted British comics from his condemnations of American publications which, unlike 'the old time English comic, known and popular here and overseas for many years, depicted not only sex but the most horrid types of crime and showed a complete disregard for the law'.¹¹⁴ Another Labour parliamentarian declared that once he had enjoyed 'British comics', but he condemned American comics such as *Jughead and Archie* for encouraging child promiscuity by presenting 'a set of behaviour-patterns uncongenial to the New Zealand way of life'.

VIII

Voices on the New Zealand left copied their ideological colleagues in western Europe, Britain, Canada and Australia in decrying American comics as nefarious agents of American cultural imperialism and Cold War propaganda. In this effort they reiterated the midcentury attempts, extensively documented by Richard Jobs and Martin Barker, of the French and British Communist parties respectively, to portray American culture and society as intrinsically vicious, contaminated and corrupt. French Communists, for example, maintained that '[t]hrough open commerce and the fiction of free enterprise, the

¹¹² J.C.Reid, submission, p.4

¹¹³ NZPD, Vol. 304, p.1319

¹¹⁴ NZPD, Vol. 304, (1954), p.1084 Both M.P.s excluded Walt Disney comics from their condemnation. NZPD, Vol. 304, (1954) p. 1319

conscience of childhood is poisoned to the profit of Yankee imperialism'.¹¹⁵ During a 1949 debate about comics in the French National Assembly, a Communist deputy denounced the 'great Hitlerophile press of America! [sic]' and insisted that 'all the publications unhealthy for our children come from America'.¹¹⁶ Communist deputies unsuccessfully tried to pass legislation that specifically targeted American comics. Furthermore, the French left deplored the superhero motif in American comics, regarding them as symbols of violent individualism, promoting 'fascistic themes' to ensure the triumph of the American way. Not only did American comics threaten national identity, and lack redeeming social purpose. They also targeted and corrupted the nation's youth.¹¹⁷

As Martin Barker has documented, the British Communist party orchestrated what began in the late forties as 'local initiatives by worried parents, teachers, and moral spokespersons' protesting against American comics.¹¹⁸ Barker showed how the British anti-comics campaign, 'drawing on a largely hidden presence' of British communists focused, ironically, 'on those comics which were most hostile to anti-communism and McCarthyism'.¹¹⁹ Essential to the BCP approach was their equation of American comics with the American capitalist way of life. After revelations in 1952 that Communists constituted the heart of the anti-comics campaign, operating through several readily identifiable party 'fronts' such as the Authors' World Peace Appeal, the BCP approach shrewdly changed to one of 'depoliticized concern'. A more innocuous organization, the Comics Campaign Council, led by a children's doctor who was a BCP member, took over the campaign. It now incorporated 'respectable' civic groups such as the Magistrates Association and the British Medical Authority in its demands for bans on American comics. The campaign's former emphasis on American comics as a threat to the British cultural heritage was replaced by a focus on them as endangering the moral and mental welfare of British children. In Barker's words, the aim was to ensure that the anti-comics campaign 'would be perceived as broad and moral rather than political'.¹²⁰

New Zealand communists transplanted the European left's critique of American popular culture into antipodean soil. The New Zealand Communist Party, like its French

¹¹⁵ Richard Jobs, 'Tarzan Under Attack: Youth, Comics, and Cultural Reconstruction in Postwar France', in *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 26, No.4 (Fall 2003), p.696

¹¹⁶ Jobs, 'Tarzan Under Attack', pp. 693-695

¹¹⁷ Jobs, 'Tarzan Under Attack', *passim*

¹¹⁸ Barker, Martin, 'Getting a Conviction: Or, How the British Horror Comics Campaign *Only* Just Succeeded' in Lent, John A., ed, *Pulp Demons*, p.70-71; Barker, *Comics: Ideology*, p.14; Barker, *A Haunt of Fears*, *passim*

¹¹⁹ Barker, *Comics: Ideology*, p.14

¹²⁰ Barker, 'Getting a Conviction', pp.72-73; Adams, 'Youth, Corruptibility', p.90

and British colleagues, focused on parental concerns about the implications of the impact of media on behaviour after the war. NZCP officials praised the campaign of English ‘teacher and parent groups’ for ‘demand[ing]’ that U.S. comics be banned. Local communists argued their case in their lively newspaper *People’s Voice* and the Marxist journal *New Zealand Labour Review*, as well as in articles and letters printed in New Zealand journals and newspapers. They also disseminated their views in petitions, local school and library committee meetings, and public meetings for ‘concerned’ parents, meetings which they frequently arranged themselves, and whose speakers included Scott and film censor Gordon Mirams.¹²¹

Some of their articles, letters and speeches – especially those of Locke, a vigorous and talented writer – are models of *agitprop* polemics. Cogent and dramatic, they ignored or downplayed any mention of their own political sympathies, adopting the persona of concerned parents and responsible community leaders. All emphasised the overriding theme of what one article labeled ‘Cultural Imperialism in N.Z.’¹²² They warned the New Zealand public of the insidious danger that American comics posed to the moral and psychological health of the nation, especially its youth, citing anecdotal evidence to support their case. The *People’s Voice* consistently represented comics and pulps as a cautionary exhibit in their display of what they regarded as the degraded ‘culture’ of American imperialism. They constituted evidence of an insidious American campaign to inure the susceptible to American capitalist-imperialist violence. This attitude enabled Bill Pearson, for example, to maintain that ‘American foreign policy was a greater danger to the world than that of the communist countries’.¹²³

The argument of Noel Hilliard, another author with communist sympathies, was encapsulated in the headline of his 1952 article: ‘Preserving Culture From the Vulture: Australia Shows the Way’.¹²⁴ His article was based on his attendance earlier that year in Australia at a conference organised by a communist front called the ‘Citizens’ Movement in Defence of Australian Arts and Culture’. He endorsed that forum’s concluding declaration as an admirable summation of the situation in New Zealand.

¹²¹ e.g. *People’s Voice*, 4 February 1953, p.3

¹²² *People’s Voice*, 4 February 1953, p.3

¹²³ Pearson, ‘Beginnings and Endings’, p.18

¹²⁴ In fact, the Australian protective citizenry had already approached New Zealand authorities to inquire about what steps were being taken here against comics. The Secretary of the Geelong branch of the Australian National Council of Women wrote to New Zealand’s Director General of Education in 1952 to obtain a ‘report of action’ taken by the Department against ‘pernicious’ comics. Director General to Hon. Secretary, Geelong branch, [Australian] National Council of Women, 30 June 1952, E2, 11/1/16 Box 683, ANZ

Our country is being flooded from coast to coast with imported books, films, magazines, comic-strips, recording, sheet-music, plays, radio transcriptions and syndicated material of all kinds, often of a very dubious artistic or social value. Submerged in a flood of crude and vulgar presentations of sex, horror and violence, Australia's youth especially stand in danger of losing their cultural heritage as well as losing their birthright as Australian citizens to engage in the trades and professions associated with the cultural field and the fine arts. Unless these trends are checked, there can be but one result ... the mental and spiritual impoverishment of our people....¹²⁵

Hilliard also placed New Zealand's situation in the wider Cold War context of international American imperialism, which he characterised as 'the Truman Doctrine, dollar diplomacy, Coca-colonisation'. National cultures were being driven out by the pervasive, invasive American 'product'. To make matters worse, that culture was 'not the best that America has to offer (even if it is a poor best) ... it is the worst, and the worst is filthy'.¹²⁶

A few months after Hilliard's article appeared in *Here & Now*, a representative of the NZCP told a Wellington meeting on comics that they were an 'attack being made on New Zealand's way of life by so-called culture alien to our own'.¹²⁷ Another NZCP member, Rita Smith, viewed American media within the context of class war. She complained that the party's tactics against American comics had neglected the proletariat's role.

We have sporadically carried on a campaign against comics and film. We have left the leadership of that struggle to the middle-class of the country. We have not brought the working-class movement into the leadership of the struggle against the bourgeois war of ideas of American comics and film.¹²⁸

Local communists denounced American comics as an instrument of U.S. militaristic expansionism symbolised by Korean war and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. 'The fact is', declared the NZCP's general secretary, Vic Wilcox, '[American] comics and radio serials are part of imperialism's drive to condition the minds of the people to a third world war....' Comics were part of what he called an American 'war culture' characterised by 'bloodshed, horror and cruelty'. The campaign against comics was 'all part of the struggle for peace'.¹²⁹ In 1952 Elsie Locke announced that

[w]e must fight against the power in this country of the worst elements of Americanised and commercialised "culture". With the fawning policy of our present Government and the

¹²⁵ Hilliard, 'Preserving Culture', pp. 18-19

¹²⁶ Hilliard, 'Preserving Culture', p.18

¹²⁷ *People's Voice*, 20 August 1952, p.4

¹²⁸ Rita Smith, 'Women On the Road to Socialism', *New Zealand Labour Review*, October 1952, p.12

¹²⁹ Vic Wilcox, "Stop the Spread of War Culture", *People's Voice*, 10 February 1954, p.5

growing audacity of U.S.A. domination, this problem will grow rapidly worse unless strenuously fought.¹³⁰

Another NZCP member, George Broad, recommended an approach of 'bringing into action the women and youth connected with them and broadening out to win an alliance with middle class and farming people....'¹³¹ His colleague, Rita Smith, provided insights into this tactic. In an article 'Winning the Women For Peace', she asked her fellow communists to consider how to 'interest and draw in the women of our street and district' on issues such as comics and movies. Smith recommended 'simple, quick action ...quick Petitions ...telegrams or deputations to the authority concerned, women will become conscious of their own power.' By organising 'Women For Peace' groups, meeting at 'afternoon teas and sewing afternoons', the party members could ensure that participants 'be encouraged to give their views on present-day films and comics, the type of toys with which their children play, and their effects upon the children'. Party members would then ensure

the discussion [was] directed to the ruthless attacks on our children's minds being made by the warmongers, and how their propaganda is laying the basis for hate and contempt to [sic] children of other nationalities, and preparing them as robots for the American war machine....¹³²

In February 1952 the *People's Voice* reported that a group calling itself the International Women's Day Committee, composed of representatives from women's organisations, was campaigning against 'Vicious Comics'.¹³³ Three months later the Wellington district committee of the NZCP announced an 'Anti-Comic Campaign' directed against 'depraved comics' with the aim of exposing 'the links between the brutality of American comics and the war drive'.¹³⁴ This campaign resulted in meetings in Wellington in August and September that year, at which party members spoke and in which 'the menace of U.S. - style comics' was lambasted and proposals to ban them were discussed.¹³⁵

The NZCP attempted to convince the public that its members were family protectors, not the dangerous revolutionaries depicted by their opponents. Party members consistently portrayed New Zealand youth as the innocent victims of the corrosive effects

¹³⁰ Elsie Locke, "Some Thoughts on a People's Culture", *Labour Review*, April 1952, p.24

¹³¹ George Broad, 'Youth in the People's Movement', *New Zealand Labour Review*, November 1951, p.10

¹³² Smith, 'Winning the War', p.19

¹³³ *People's Voice*, 27 February 1952, p.6

¹³⁴ *People's Voice*, 28 May 1952, p.4

¹³⁵ *People's Voice*, 20 August 1952, p.4; 10 September 1952, p.4

of American comics and films, which Vic Wilcox, denounced as ‘so damaging especially to the minds of our young people’.¹³⁶ A *People’s Voice* headline accused such media of being the chief cause of ‘A TIDAL WAVE OF JUVENILE CRIME’.¹³⁷ The newspaper proclaimed that youthful crime in Mt. Roskill was ‘deeply worrying parents, teachers and others. But no attempt has yet been made to get at the root of the trouble: vicious comics and films.’ This ‘flood of juvenile crime is a result of the flood of Mickey Spillanes, American comics, and films of crime and violence which are the mental food for thousands of children.’ The *Voice* blamed the National government. ‘It is not prepared to offend its American bosses by interfering with their main propaganda method: the poisoning of children’s minds.’¹³⁸ George Broad claimed

It is clear that to defeat the people, the warmongers must successfully militarise the youth, and win them to reaction and fascism by giving them glamour and excitement, and poisoning their minds with all the racist and anti-Soviet, anti-Communist dope they can churn out. This is the significance of the huge importation of comics, pulp magazines and novels, films of sadism and sex, and slushy songs.¹³⁹

When C.A. Birchfield presented the party’s submission to the Mazengarb inquiry on youthful immorality, he described American comics as ‘pernicious’, ‘degrading’, as well as ‘encouraging racial prejudices and glorification of violence and brutal behavior.’¹⁴⁰ That year the NZCP General Secretary Vic Wilcox claimed that New Zealanders ‘have become almost used to comics appearing in our newspapers depicting torture and sudden death with glamour and glee.’¹⁴¹ The *Voice* also accused ‘American-style children’s comics’ of ‘preaching hate and violence against Koreans’, singling out the *Soldier Comics* series for ‘teaching children to hate and kill, to accept brutality as part of life.’¹⁴²

Like their French and British colleagues, the NZCP tried to associate the world’s largest capitalist society in the public mind with war, violence and the denigration of traditional family values. Their assault on American comics and pulps thus focused on portraying the allegedly corrupt and degenerate content of U.S. popular media as representing the noisome effluent of a debauched and malignant capitalist system. These tropes could be readily be manipulated to attract the attention of bourgeois claims-makers

¹³⁶ Vic Wilcox, ‘Stop the Spread of War Culture’, 10 February 1954, p.5

¹³⁷ *People’s Voice*, 14 April 1954, p.3

¹³⁸ ‘Tidal Wave of Juvenile Crime’, *People’s Voice*, 14 April 1954, p.3

¹³⁹ Broad, ‘People’s Movement’, pp.10-11

¹⁴⁰ Submission of Communist Party of New Zealand, 12 August 1954, Folder 07, ATL: MS Papers 2384,

¹⁴¹ ‘Stop the War Culture’, *People’s Voice* 10 February 1954, p.5. Wilcox provided no evidence to support his claim.

¹⁴² *People’s Voice*, 27 January 1954, p.2

such as teachers, clergy, librarians and health professionals. The particular genius of the NZCP campaign was its portrayal of American culture as not only endangering international peace, but also threatening New Zealand's way of life and menacing its youth. Furthermore, by representing American comics as inferior and salacious medium that jeopardised a sanctified literary culture, the left aligned itself with the values of the cultural arbiters.

IX

New Zealand communists were not the only ones to claim that comics demonstrated the intellectual poverty of American culture. The perceived crudity, coarseness and 'low' content of comics disturbed those New Zealanders already concerned that working-class *mores* were insufficiently genteel and cultured.¹⁴³ Many of these intellectual and civic elites argued that comics and pulps appealed to those whose rational and intellectual faculties were not fully developed, such as children, and those adults whom *Truth* described as 'half-wits and morons'.¹⁴⁴ They conflated youthful readers to include the wider public. Christabel Robinson, writing in the journal *New Zealand Libraries* in 1947, claimed that '[a]bout 20 per cent of New Zealand children – and consequently, I suppose, adults – are so backward that teaching methods suited to the average child are inappropriate and even harmful'. She maintained that

many people are not interested in the printed word... They like to see for themselves, so they crowd the picture theatres night after night, and they buy illustrated papers of all kinds. But the mental effort required is really too much for them.¹⁴⁵

This belief in the mental lassitude of New Zealanders was widespread. A *Listener* correspondent, R.A. Tennant, regarded the New Zealand public as addicted to what he describes as 'mental narcotics [such] as strips, digests and sensationalist literature,' adding

¹⁴³ As early as 1906, the American journal *The Atlantic Monthly* labeled the comic supplements 'humour prepared and printed for the extremely dull'. Their chief characters were rowdy, scruffy, working-class youths whose adventures took the form of mocking or defying authority in the form of hapless parents, teachers and police. Their comic foil, a police inspector claimed that for the Katzenjammer twins, 'Society iss nix'. Ralph Bergengren, 'The Humor of the Colored Supplement', *The Atlantic Monthly*, August, 1906, pp.269-73, <www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1969/12/the-humor-of-the-colored-supplement/4232>, accessed 9 July, 2009; David Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague: the Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), pp.10-11

¹⁴⁴ 'Hue and Cry About Comics', *Truth*, 17 September 1952, p.14

¹⁴⁵ Christabel Robinson, 'Books For Young Adults', *New Zealand Libraries*, June 1947, p.95

that ‘many of them originate in America, and cost us dollars as well as intelligent citizens’. When a *Cue* contributor, ‘Salamander’, condemned American ‘Digests’, he claimed they were ‘Frankenstein Monsters’, ‘beloved by the ‘mentally bankrupt The reader is pandered to in his laziness.’¹⁴⁶ That readership was sometimes identified as working or lower-class; at times, readers of comics and pulps seemed to be condemned as much for their class status as for their reading habits.¹⁴⁷ This of course was also a feature of the earliest criticisms of comics in America. ‘The first mission of the funny pages’, according to David Hajdu, ‘was to convoke the lower classes’.¹⁴⁸ William Lass, editor of an American comics publishing syndicate, noted that ‘no comic[s] artist can afford to sever his umbilical cord to the belly of the common people’.¹⁴⁹ Thus from the beginning, American comic strips such as *The Katjenjammer Kids*, very popular in New Zealand, represented America’s immigrant poor in particular and the American working class in general. A discussion of comics by ‘M.L.D.’ in *Here & Now*’s ‘A Housewife’s Diary’ column in 1952 pointedly distinguished between ‘better-educated, better-informed men and women’, whom the author identified as those belonging to ‘University and higher education circles’, and what the columnist bluntly termed the ‘ordinary unintellectual public’. ‘M.L.D.’ accused the better-informed as failing to understand the dire impact of such literature on

the lives of working-class children in some of the less-favoured parts of New Zealand. There are big, thickly-housed areas in Auckland, where no public library is available to children, where many mothers go to work in local factories and the children run the streets after school hours Every small newsagent sells crime comics and the children swop them around the gang until they become ragged. Parents find them exciting and are often the first to introduce them into the home. For many city Maoris, comics are a comprehensible form of literature second only to Best Bets.¹⁵⁰

‘Inferior’ literature such as comics was thus specifically identified with the allegedly limited literary repertoire of Maori, whose favourite form of reading was assumed to be racing guides. Similarly, ‘inferior’ music and movies such as swing and westerns were also closely linked associated with that race. M.L.D.’s article also illustrates how some New Zealand critiques of American comics conflated the medium’s youthful audience into a

¹⁴⁶ *Cue*, No. 10, pp.18-19. Further confirmation that some cultural guardians had little confidence in the intelligence of New Zealand citizens was provided in 1953 when Christchurch’s Chief Public Librarian ordered the removal from its shelves of all books on abnormal psychology, palmistry, astrology, dreams and spiritualism on the grounds that they were ‘magnets to many to whom they would be dangerous’. *Truth*, 4 February 1953, p.5

¹⁴⁷ See David Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague: the Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), p.12 for this situation in the USA.

¹⁴⁸ Hajdu, *Ten-Cent Plague*, p. 9

¹⁴⁹ David Michaelis, *Schultz and Peanuts: a Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), p.74

¹⁵⁰ ‘A Housewife’s Diary’, *Here & Now*, July 1952, p.19

much wider public. Although the ostensible subject of the article was the effect of ‘comics’ on New Zealand *children*, its author subtly extended the audience of that medium. (S)he referred first to a readership of ‘children’ and ‘working-class children’; however, within a few sentences that audience has suddenly become ‘parents’ in general, who not only find them stimulating entertainment but who are accused - without any proof - of frequently being the ones who provide their children with access to this particular form of literature.

The logic of such approaches to comics implied that their extended but child-like audience required quarantining and protection for their own moral and cultural good. Dalziel and others who infantilised the local comic-reading public assumed that this audience was unable to distance itself from the content. They also regarded the public as unaware of the conventions and ironies of the comic form and conventions. Most crucially, these critics assumed that the audience was unable to understand what Varnedoe and Gopnik describe as the comics’ ‘distant relation to any real experience’. In fact, research suggests that even youthful readers/audiences are quite capable of appreciating that a horror or crime comic is indeed just that, a stylised fiction. As such, it is another variant of a Grimm Brothers’ fairy tale.¹⁵¹ By demanding that such literature be suppressed or censored, New Zealand’s opponents of ‘comics’ could both assert their insistence that low culture be closely monitored while justifying their self-appointed roles as the guardians of youth and civic morality and the protectors of high culture.

X

Many New Zealand critiques on both left and right shared a bifurcated cultural perspective that followed from their authors’ insistence on a demarcation between ‘high’ and ‘low’ cultures. In this mind-set, the crucial media of American popular culture, namely jazz, movies and comics / pulps, epitomised a pernicious and disreputable ‘low’ culture. W.J. Scott’s survey of reading tastes had denied comics the status of cultural legitimacy. In 1946 Allan Black, a contributor to the literary journal *Letters*, explicitly contrasted “‘pulp” magazines and other publications of a salacious and gangster type.... mass produced material of the sex and crime type’ with what he described as ‘publications of a more cultural nature’, which constituted a ‘higher class of literature’.¹⁵² Dalziel’s 1955 survey

¹⁵¹ Varnedoe and Gopnik, *High & Low*, p.187. The pair discuss this issue in some detail, pp.186-8.

¹⁵² Allan Black, ‘Pulp Literature in N.Z.[sic]’, *Letters*, No.10 (1945), p.23. *Letters* was soon to change its name to *Arena*.

rejected any consideration of comics as possessing literary merit. ‘There will be no attempt to give them serious consideration on aesthetic grounds, because they are simply not worth it.’¹⁵³ Elsie Locke deplored American comics’ ‘commercialised violence [which] is utterly different in quality and scope from nursery rhymes and stories, *Alice in Wonderland*, Dante and Shakespeare.’¹⁵⁴ Her fellow Communist, the author Noel Hilliard,¹⁵⁵ refused to consider comics and pulp fiction, along with Hollywood movies, as contenders for the cultural Pantheon. For Hilliard, America was a ‘lynchers’ paradise’ and a cultural wasteland. In a remarkable judgement he announced that ‘it is years since the United States produced a top-ranking work of art –literary, dramatic, visual or otherwise. The best (meaning that which merits serious critical attention) has been second-rate. The worst is probably the most rotten in the world today.’¹⁵⁶

Hilliard and Scott regarded comics as not only the antithesis of what they considered to be proper culture, i.e. ‘high’ culture. This popular American medium also threatened the traditional process of deference of the relatively uneducated classes to those possessing the necessary educational and cultural capital that enabled them to pass judgment on aesthetic matters. Their approach to culture paralleled that of the *Landfall* editor and literary midwife, Charles Brasch, who, as W.H. Oliver noted, favoured the concept of a clerisy, ‘a class of people responsible for the preservation of the values that give meaning to society’.¹⁵⁷ Ian Richards, whose biography of the novelist Maurice Duggan includes a trenchant discussion of the postwar Auckland literary intelligentsia, including Bill Pearson, Frank Sargeson, Rex Fairburn and Keith Sinclair, concluded that ‘at their worst ...[they] could still insist on themselves as an island of high European culture in a sea of New Zealand philistinism’.¹⁵⁸ Fairburn’s *We New Zealanders* portrayed the nation’s citizens as boors whose collective cultural souls could be redeemed only by a

¹⁵³ Margaret Dalziel, ‘Comics’, *Landfall*, Vol.9, No.1 (March 1955), p.43

¹⁵⁴ Elsie Locke, ‘Crime Comics –Outlet Or Incitement?’, *Listener*, 3 September 1954, p.8

¹⁵⁵ In the late forties, Hilliard worked for the Labour Party newspaper *Southern Cross* and was Secretary of the Wellington Labour Party. He then wrote for overseas Communist publications such as the London *Daily Worker*. He formally joined the New Zealand Communist Party in March 1951. See Trevor J. Mullinder, ‘A Descriptive Account of Social Attitudes in the Fiction of Noel Hilliard’ (University of Canterbury M.A. Thesis in English, 1976), pp.8-11

¹⁵⁶ Noel Hilliard, ‘Preserving Culture From the Vulture: Australia Shows the Way’, *Here & Now*, July 1952, p.18

¹⁵⁷ W.H. Oliver, ‘“A Citizen of the English Language”: Charles Brasch in his Time in Donald Kerr, ed, *Enduring Legacy: Charles Brasch, Patron, Poet & Collector* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2003), pp.115-126

¹⁵⁸ Richards, *Bed at Noon*, p.70

process Richards summarises as ‘upgrading New Zealand culture to European standards’ – in effect, a variant of cultural cringe.¹⁵⁹

For many of New Zealand’s cultural guardians, American comics epitomised ‘low’ culture that presented a dangerous allure for the young and those lacking educational and cultural capital. Such people were unlikely to recognize the moral and cultural danger presented by comics and so needed protection for their own good. ‘F.L.C.’, writing in *National Education* placed this trope within the wider context of a consideration of the impact of popular culture within New Zealand.

To what extent’, (s)he asked, ‘can really learning to read (not to soak up ink from wood pulp as fast as the presses without a thought for its quality) ever be used to counteract the levelling down influence of the popular agencies of our culture? That is the crucial cultural problem of our time. “But,” says an objector, “is it not the highbrow and puritanical to thus condemn and oppose the popular taste? Has not the ordinary man a sovereign right to remain ordinary, even dead ordinary, in his likes and dislikes?” The answer was that it was ‘a civic duty’ to ‘purge’ such poisons from the body politic. New Zealanders with a concern for the moral health of the community had a responsibility to act for the good of those lacking the requisite judgement and educational and cultural capital. Such people were unlikely to recognize the moral and cultural danger presented by comics and so needed protection for their own good.¹⁶⁰

One of the most forceful proponents of the argument that American comics had disastrous effects on the young was the Auckland academic and author, Bill Pearson. He insisted these comics ‘erode the most fundamental habits of humane, cultured living: love, tolerance, forgiveness, integrity, trust, loyalty and compassion are replaced by fear, hatred, selfishness, cruelty, cunning and deceit’. Before the war Pearson had been a voracious reader of American fiction, especially that of Jack London and John Dos Passos. But according to Jeffrey Holman, ‘as a result of his newfound Cold War anti-Americanism’, Pearson ‘read no new North American fiction after the early 1950s’.¹⁶¹ For an author whose career involved teaching literature at university level, this was a dubious stance,

¹⁵⁹ Richards, *Bed at Noon*, p.64

¹⁶⁰ *National Education*, 2 February 1948, p.13. Similarly, the Presbyterian General Assembly in 1947 sought to ‘safeguard the true interests of the public, especially the young’ from contamination by ‘certain types of undesirable literature ... which were ‘find[ing] their way into the Dominion’. Report of the Public Questions Committee of the Presbyterian General Assembly of New Zealand, *Auckland Star*, 30 October 1947, p.3

¹⁶¹ Pearson, ‘Beginnings and Endings’, p. 18; Peter Simpson, ‘Bill Pearson’s New Zealand Then and Now: Testimony of an Internal Rapporteur’, *Landfall*, Vol. 5, No.2, (Spring 1997), p.207; Jeffrey Paparoa Holman, ‘Under-Read, Underwritten, Undercover: William Harrison (Bill) Pearson, 1922-2002’, *Landfall* No.205, (Autumn 2003), p.154. According to Millar, Pearson’s ‘past goodwill towards things American faded; it now looked as if McCarthyism and the execution of the Rosenbergs defined the USA more honestly than its literature, which he ceased reading.... although he never joined the Communist party, he became for a time [when in London] a doctrinaire fellow traveller, subscribing to *The Daily Worker*.... Millar describes the period from late 1951 until 1954 as ‘a time of constant political involvement’ in left-wing causes. Millar, *No Fretful Sleeper*, p.183

given the remarkable body of American fiction published in the fifties and sixties.¹⁶² It also indicated the religious intensity with which some intellectuals like Pearson attempted to flee contamination from the cultural demons that they believed lurked within America's capitalist culture.

In his seminal 1952 essay, 'Fretful Sleepers: a Sketch of New Zealand Behaviour and Its Implications For the Artist',¹⁶³ Pearson condemned New Zealand intellectuals who 'talk of getting rid of nonconformist conscience'. He warned that they 'should take care that they are not allying themselves with Hollywood, the ZB stations, the gutter press and the American-style comics that our children and jockeys read, in ushering in a period of decadence.'¹⁶⁴ Within one sentence Pearson identified three key targets of contemporary condemnations of America and its culture – its films, its music, and its print media, especially comics. Furthermore, he both infantilised and diminished their New Zealand audience – 'our children and jockeys' – while employing another familiar trope of the critics of American popular culture: that its presence in New Zealand represented an injection of moral and cultural degeneracy.

Three years later Pearson alleged that comics possessed a 'hatred of intellectuals', a group he likened, without any ironic register, to 'cultural mandarins'. In a letter to *Landfall*, Pearson condemned D.H. Munro, who had recently commented *inter alia* that he was more concerned about the literary shortcomings of comics and pulps rather than any emphasis on sex and violence. Relying on his months as a not very successful relieving teacher in London working-class schools,¹⁶⁵ Pearson claimed that his primary students' penchant for drawing violent scenes from Hollywood films and comics represented the decline of 'proper' culture. As evidence, he cited a young student who dismissed Pearson's assertion that flying saucers did not exist with the riposte that 'I seen them in the pitchers'. Although a wiser teacher than Pearson would have recognized that statement as perfectly appropriate in terms of the child's age and stage of cognitive development, for him it denoted

¹⁶² Pearson thereby deprived himself of some of the seminal works of post-1945 literature. These include Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, several of William Faulkner's novels, Saul Bellow's *Adventures of Augie March*, *Seize the Day* and *Henderson the Rain King*, and Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*, as well as several of Tennessee Williams' and Arthur Miller's best plays. Poets such as Wallace Stevens, Randall Jarrell, Robert Lowell and Theodore Roethke also made outstanding contributions to Anglo-American literature during this era.

¹⁶³ Pearson's essay first appeared in *Landfall*, Vol.6, No.3 (September 1952), pp.201-230

¹⁶⁴ Pearson, 'Fretful Sleepers', p.225

¹⁶⁵ Henry Wimborne, a London acquaintance of Pearson, and an instructor of returned servicemen training for teaching, 'got the impression that he [Pearson] was a terrible teacher'. Millar, *No Fretful Sleeper*, p.208

a rejection of the authority of tradition without which continuance of culture is impossible. That boy had these attitudes directly implanted by comics and film: interest in violence, fear of science, pagan superstition. In their hatred of intellectuals, the comics in fact threaten the cultural mandarins more viciously than any other force in society.¹⁶⁶

Significantly, Pearson's indignation was directed at this blow to his own perceived status as a cultural arbiter and monitor of high bourgeois culture. Intellectuals who failed to take the lead in denouncing comics and pulp magazines, and those who defended such publications, were thus collaborators in cultural, moral and social depravity. Pearson seemed to be suggesting that New Zealand intellectuals had dual roles. One was pastoral, protecting a flock of naïve innocents from the ravages of American culture; the other was that of a caste of sages, dispensing cultural wisdom and guidance. He also warned of an approaching cultural apocalypse, presumably if the populace ignored the elites' strictures. 'It is not inconceivable that we are raising a generation who will bring civilization tumbling down about our heads, and exult in it; who will hate and fear things of the mind and spirit....'¹⁶⁷

Pearson's mandarin attitudes achieved literary embodiment in his 'social realist' novel *Coal Flat*, published in 1963 but set in 1947 and written during in the immediate postwar period.¹⁶⁸ Its hero, Paul Rogers, a young, idealistic, left-wing teacher, described by Holman as 'a mouthpiece for laudable intentions',¹⁶⁹ and teaching in a West Coast mining town, warns the local working-class population of the dangers of 'filthy' American comics – 'sadistic and cruel and vulgar. They're evil. full of war, crime, sex, violence, and cruelty ...[harmful] to children's minds'. These 'luridly coloured' comics, with their stories featuring 'a jungle girl, a ferocious young woman with a Hollywood hair-do' are eagerly read by a disturbed child in Paul's class.¹⁷⁰ In one episode Rogers confronts a shopkeeper.

'Sid,' he said. 'I wish you wouldn't stock these comics.' ...

'Why? What's wrong with them?' he said.

Rogers picked one from a pile. He opened at a page with strips of war scenes full of explosions. He pointed to a close-up view of a bayonet plunging into a man's stomach.

'Well, you wouldn't call that healthy, would you?'

'Arh, it's only pictures.'

¹⁶⁶ *Landfall*, Vol.9, No.1 (March 1955), pp.95-6

¹⁶⁷ *Landfall*, Vol.9, No.1 (March 1955), pp.95-6 Paul Millar discusses this letter in *No Fretful Sleeper*, pp.255-6

¹⁶⁸ Paul Millar, 'William Harrison Pearson: 1922-2002', *Journal of New Zealand Literature*, No.20 (2002), p.168. See also Millar's *No Fretful Sleeper* for detailed discussion of the novel.

¹⁶⁹ Holman, 'Under-Read,' pp.152-7, *Landfall* No. 205 (Autumn 2003), p.154.

¹⁷⁰ Bill Pearson, *Coal Flat*, (Auckland: Paul's Book Arcade, 1963), p.107; p. 115; p.104

‘These pictures have an effect on kids. That’s how Nazi children were recruited, reared on war propaganda.’
 ‘Oh, garn. You political blokes read too much into everything....’
 ‘Would you like your own kids to read this poison?’
 ‘They do already. Doesn’t do them no harm. *I* ought to know. I see them every day.’....
 ‘You don’t want to trade on doing violence to children’s minds, do you?’
 ‘Oh, garn! Watcha talking about? Kids like excitement. It doesn’t do them no harm. Look at the gangster films.’
 ‘Well, if I had my way, I’d cut them out too.’
 You’re just a bloody spoil-sport, that’s what you are. A bloody killjoy. Weren’t you a kid yourself once? I used to read comics and Deadwood Dicks myself. I bet you did too.’
 ‘The comics I read were different from these. They were like Sunday School picnics compared with this. *Sunbeam* and *Tiger Tim* and those. These are gruesome.’¹⁷¹

This excerpt provides a fascinating summary of the crucial tropes that some New Zealand intellectuals employed in their responses to American comics. That medium was accused of having a toxic effect on youth, of being violent, repulsive and warmongering, and equated with Nazi propaganda. U.S. comics were unflatteringly contrasted with English comics. Pearson employed a formal, grammatical register to voice the attitudes of a teacher acting as a protective citizen ostensibly protecting community and moral values. The rejoinders of the shopkeeper by contrast rely on emotional arguments and a colloquial and ungrammatical vocabulary. The teacher’s sense of dignified responsibility is contrasted with the shopkeeper’s fecklessness. The novel’s guardian figure’s suggested solution to the comics problem is ‘cut them out’ - the simplest if most draconian form of control of media. In fact, Pearson argued elsewhere that ‘[i]f we ban the comics, we are reducing the chance of war and preventing the further perversion of the children’.¹⁷²

This proposed policy of cultural excision, along with its companion remedies ‘restriction’ and ‘control’, were advocated in New Zealand not only on the left but also by protective citizens of more conservative political persuasion, such as Hilda Ross, the Minister in charge of Women and Children in the National government. A crucial justification for this process, invoked by both left and right, involved equating the ‘flood’ of American comics with the effects of poison or pollution, requiring immediate and

¹⁷¹ Pearson, *Coal Flat*, pp.108-9. According to Millar, Pearson drew on his argument in his *Landfall* letter to make comics ‘both a cause and symptom’ of the severely dysfunctional behaviour of one of Roger’s students, thus precipitating a key plot development. Millar, *No Fretful Sleeper*, p.266

¹⁷² Pearson, letter, *Landfall*, Vol.9, No.1 (March 1955), p. 96

drastic counter-measures to remove the contaminant.¹⁷³ Locke complained about the comics' 'floods of crime pictures [which were] fed to children too young to know that they are swallowing corrosive poison.'¹⁷⁴ Other critics claimed that American comics were 'mental narcotics' which eroded the intelligence of their addicted readers, as part of 'the American policy of keeping the people doped.'¹⁷⁵ The Anglican journal *Church and People*, hardly a bastion of radicalism, vividly combined analogies of comics as evil and pollutant in claiming that 'what is being produced can only be described as "The Devil in Ink" and precious young minds are being poisoned.' The journal insisted that this contamination meant '[we] are reaping the reward of a godless secular society whose standards are no longer Christian.' It maintained that the literature available in New Zealand should be 'cleansed' and that the police should 'exercise a far stricter censorship'.¹⁷⁶

Opponents of American comics frequently insisted such 'adulterating' literature should be banned, not by judicial assessment of their contents, but by government edict, using the Customs Department to enforce licensing regulations in order to prevent their entry into New Zealand.¹⁷⁷ That influential cultural template, Henderson's 'Concern Over Comics' had claimed as early as 1945 that '[o]ne beneficial effect of import restrictions, from the viewpoint of educationists, is the banning of pulp magazines....' The same article also cited 'officials at the School Publications Branch of the Education Department', who endorsed W.H. Auden's opinion that comics were 'a degenerate 'middle-brow' horror' and recommended that the supply of 'yellow' comics be pruned or lopped off entirely.¹⁷⁸ Proscription of American comics was also a mantra of the radical left. During the Korean war, and its immediate aftermath, the *People's Voice* campaigned to suppress all American comics. Elsie Locke demanded censorship of comics 'in the public interest'.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷³ Thus West German critics of American comics denounced them as 'poison', 'opium for the child' and 'infectious disease'. Jovanovic and Koch, 'Comics Debate in Germany', p.111. Openshaw and Shuker have observed that in New Zealand, aspects of American culture were frequently perceived 'very much in terms of negative imagery: there is almost automatic use of the term "trash"; constant references to flood, deluge... to invasion or cultural aggression, to sexual perversion or corruption, and to disease'. Openshaw and Shuker, 'Silent Movies', p.54. As I demonstrate in Chapter Six, opponents of American movies also employed such imagery.

¹⁷⁴ Elsie Locke, 'Crime Comics – Outlet or Incitement', *Listener*, 3 September 1954, p.8

¹⁷⁵ *Listener*, 30 January 1948, p.5; *Press*, 5 October 1954, p.9

¹⁷⁶ *Church and People*, 4 August 1954, pp.1-3

¹⁷⁷ A common suggestion of those who complained about comics in letters to the editor was that the Minister of Customs should use import controls to prevent them entering the country, e.g. *Herald*, 18 February 1945, p.4

¹⁷⁸ 'Concern Over Comics: A *Korero* Report', Part 2, 16 June 1945, Vol.3, No12, p.10

¹⁷⁹ Elsie Locke, 'Crime Comics', p.8

Had Locke and other critics cast an eye over those war comics that were available locally, they would have found that some trenchantly investigated current political and international issues. Some comics' presentations of the Korean war were, according to Savage's analysis of their content, deeply pessimistic, anti-heroic and 'awash in ambiguity and uncertainty'. According to him they 'spoke constantly about death.... They struck more than a few sour notes in what was supposed to have been a fairly simple tune of glory'. In fact, Savage concludes that this realism, 'if it did not transform comic books into the only substantial body of public antiwar literature ... it surely dampened readers' enthusiasms for that kind of conflict'.¹⁸⁰ And some humorous comics and comic strips of a type freely available in the early 1950s in New Zealand, such as *Sad Sack* and *Beetle Bailey*, lampooned American army life to the point of denigration.¹⁸¹

The contentions of New Zealand's anti-comics lobbyists that violent and lurid comics circulated freely to a large and salivating audience of New Zealanders were based on hearsay and anecdotal evidence. Fears about the widespread availability of graphically violent, horrific and sexually explicit comics resembled another obsession of the early postwar period, the sighting of flying saucers. Despite frequent claims that violent, horrific or sexually explicit comics were 'inundating' New Zealand, verifiable proof that such literature was widely available in New Zealand and widely read by children remains as rare as confirmed visitations by aliens. Nor was there any documented and researched proof that such literature had deleterious effects on young or old.¹⁸² William Savage, who has actually studied the American data, concludes that some comics did indeed contain 'excesses of gratuitous, graphic violence'. He deplored what he called the 'imperialist, colonialist, paternalistic and racist thrust' of 'jungle comics', although he noted that many of the villains were white. He also maintained that although some comics and pulps

¹⁸⁰ Savage, *Commies, Cowboys*, p.53. Savage maintains that comic books 'presented the American fighting man in a new and troubling light. He was frequently brave and sometimes cowardly, but whatever the quality of his courage, his character was not without serious flaw. In any case, he had a better than even chance to end up dead.... Death was the thing that separated comic books of the Korean era from those of World War II. In Korea, comic books held, American boys dropped like flies. Those who survived were confronted at every turn by irrefutable evidence of their mortality.... There was so much death – and so much fear of it – in Korean-era comic books that it overwhelmed any and all jingoistic philosophies attendant upon individual stories....' Furthermore, the *Two-Fisted Tales* series presented critical revisionist perspectives of past 'heroic' conflicts, portraying, for example, Custer as a vainglorious fool despised by his troops. Savage, *Commies, Cowboys*, pp. 52-7

¹⁸¹ Savage, *Commies, Cowboys*, p.58; p.56 -7.

¹⁸² William Gaines, the publisher of Entertaining Comics (EC), cited a comment by James Walker, a former mayor of New York city, that he had never known a girl to be ruined by a book. Nobody, Gaines claimed, had ever been ruined by a comic. Richard Corliss, 'The Glory and Horror of EC Comics', 29 April, 2004, <<http://www.time.com/time/columnist/corliss/article/0,9565,631203,00.html>>, accessed 1 September 2010

mirrored a racist and sexist society, they also reflected that society's political confusion and its attempts to adjust to profound social, cultural and economic changes.¹⁸³

XI

For some of the civic and cultural elites, the actual content of such comics was hardly the issue. Supervision and control of the medium offered an opportunity to extend their administrative boundaries, configure their public profiles and enforce their aesthetic standards. Thus film censor Gordon Mirams sought to extend his expurgatorial powers to include what he termed 'control' of comics. In 1952 he lobbied both the Interior Affairs department and his extensive official contacts to obtain this extension of his cultural supervision. On 12 August Mirams attended a meeting of officials and interested parties on the subject of 'Control of Certain Types of Comics'. This discussed the Inter-Departmental Committee for Controlling Comics' recent proposals on classificatory 'supervision' of comics and the establishment of an Appeal Board for Comics.¹⁸⁴ The Committee had recommended that the film censor be a member of the proposed Board, but Mirams complained that this 'came in for criticism from the representatives of interested parties (i.e. the publishers of comics)'. He also dismissed the grounds for such criticism – including the argument that the Appeal Board should be a 'judicial, non-Governmental body' - as 'red herrings'. Mirams urged an even wider extension of his censorial powers, claiming

[I]t had been suggested that he should have something to do with comics: i.e. the relationship between film and comics; the fact that material for children's entertainment was involved in both fields; and that the Film Censor's experience in the one field might be of value in the other.... Somewhere along the line, the Film Censor must be brought into the picture, even if it were only in an advisory or informative capacity; there must be some liaison between the two branches of censorship.¹⁸⁵

There was, Mirams claimed, 'fairly general acceptance of this view'. He argued that he should become an integral part of any comics' censorship process, beginning not at the Appeal Board level but 'at an earlier stage, in order, for example, to secure some

¹⁸³ William W. Savage, Jr., *Commies, Cowboys*, p. 97; 102; 113-114; pp.76-7

¹⁸⁴ Memo from Gordon Mirams to Assistant Secretary of Internal Affairs, 19 August 1952, IA 83 15, Film Censors Office, ANZ. The Committee was set up following the issuing of the Customs Department Report 'Worthless and Indecent Literature' in March 1952.

¹⁸⁵ Memo from Gordon Mirams to Assistant Secretary of Internal Affairs, 19 August 1952, IA 83 15 Film Censors Office, ANZ

uniformity of treatment for material common to both comics and films'.¹⁸⁶ What Mirams sought was to establish himself as the focus of official surveillance of the circulation of two of the most popular variants of American culture. However, his proposals did not receive government endorsement.

Such demands for cultural interdiction did not go unopposed. One of the leading campaigners against increased censorship was the iconoclastic tabloid *Truth*. In January 1946, Nash, the Minister of Customs, warned that additional restrictions might be applied to that species of imported literature which, 'while possibly not giving much prominence to sex, etc., was definitely not of a worthwhile type'.¹⁸⁷ *Truth* replied with an editorial, 'Putting the People in Blinkers', which denounced the Fraser government's use of recently amended licensing regulations to regulate the importation of imported literature. These regulations explicitly banned the importation of literary media that purportedly 'gave undue prominence to sex, obscenity, horror, terror, cruelty or crime'. *Truth* argued '[t]he Security censorship system enforced during the war years is now to give way to a morality censorship by bureaucrats. The arch- priest of the system is to be presumably, the Rt. Hon. Walter Nash' It claimed that existing legislation provided 'ample protection against undesirable literature'. The consequence of the regulations, according to *Truth*, would be 'to have NZers [sic] run in blinders'.¹⁸⁸ Six years later *Truth* attacked the Holland's National government about rumours of plans to register comics and establish a board of censors. 'Was there ever such a lot of nonsense? What are we coming to in this country? We are becoming so circumscribed by bureaucratic regulation that even the children's comics have got to be regimented.' *Truth* called for the parents not the State to censor their children's reading matter; there was 'quite enough censorship in this country.... Let's take this censorship bug out of our system'.¹⁸⁹

Politicians on the right as well as the left, and a range of religious and community groups also condemned American comics on the grounds that they encouraged criminal and anti-social attitudes amongst the young. In 1947 the Catholic newspaper the *New Zealand Tablet* expressed concern about the '[h]arm wrought to youngsters through so-called comic books' and insisted that 'crime comics point children into the field of

¹⁸⁶ Mirams Memo, 19 August, 1952

¹⁸⁷ *Evening Post*, 14 January 1946, p.8, cited Burns, 'Some Aspects of Censorship', p. 92

¹⁸⁸ 'Putting the People in Blinkers', *Truth*, 23 January 1946, p. 12

¹⁸⁹ 'Hue and Cry About Comics', *Truth*, 17 September 1952, p.14

crime'.¹⁹⁰ Seven years later, the *Tablet* complained about those publications - identifiable as comics and pulp magazines - which 'pander to the lowest taste and which are morally harmful to readers of all ages, particularly the young'.¹⁹¹ That year, the Youth Director of the Presbyterian Church informed the Mazengarb committee on moral delinquency that

there is no doubt that youngsters can be influenced to regard the low life depicted in some comics as normal.... Our church committee had before it samples of comics from throughout New Zealand, and we were left without a shadow of a doubt that a big proportion of the comics must have a bad effect on children's minds at the formative stage.¹⁹²

Some important public servants insisted on the connection between comics and juvenile 'immorality'. The head of the School Library Service declared that 'this poisonous mushroom growth' of comic-reading threatened not just New Zealand children but also 'young people and adults'.¹⁹³ The Education Department's Publications Branch suggested this threat could be overcome by 'by flooding the country with well-illustrated children's books' which would 'satisfy a child's imagination'. It suggested '*Picture Folk Tales* and *Legends of the United Nations*' as examples. According to the branch, New Zealand youngsters could be tempted away from American comics if they were provided with by a New Zealand substitute: one which would be 'informative, essentially rich in the human element, treat history in illustrated strips'.¹⁹⁴

Here, as overseas, the debate over comics was essentially what Jovanovic and Koch call an 'effects debate'.¹⁹⁵ In New Zealand teachers, educationists, child welfare 'specialists' and other child saver groups dominated that debate. Some of them assumed a dichotomy that classified literature as either good or bad, with comics categorised as unequivocally bad. Yet there were those who defended comics, acknowledging that they had a positive educative and even psychological role. In 1949 the Inspector of Schools summarised a survey of the content of comics available in New Zealand under the heading 'What can be done about the Comics?' He concluded that '[c]hildren will continue to read them. Indeed for many children the comics will provide their first approach to reading, and we must recognize the comics as part of every child's reading background'. He decided that the 'Super-hero' type comics resembled 'fairy stories and folk tales [in that] they provide a means of escape, a release from tension. They are far-fetched and incredible, but I see no real harm in them'.

¹⁹⁰ *New Zealand Tablet*, 23 July 1947, pp.10-11

¹⁹¹ *New Zealand Tablet*, 21 April 1954, p.9

¹⁹² *Star-Sun*, 29 July 1954, p.1

¹⁹³ 'Concern Over Comics', *New Zealand Libraries*, September 1945, p.146

¹⁹⁴ 'Concern Over Comics', p.146

¹⁹⁵ Jovanovic and Koch, 'Comics Debate in Germany', p.121

The survey's author rejected censorship of content but favoured censorship of format. Overall, he concluded, 'the content of the comics may be banal and infantile, but none I saw was suggestive or downright vicious; nor was the element of horror overplayed'.¹⁹⁶

The 1951 annual meeting of the New Zealand Educational Institute adopted a resolution, which 'recogniz[ed] the increasing importance of comics in the life of the child', while suggesting the Education department rigorously screen such publications. It also requested the department to 'investigate the desirability of the comic as an educational aid'.¹⁹⁷ A member of the NZEI Executive, Miss E.M. Nelson, admitted that 'we are perhaps getting rather old. So much of what we consider harmful to children may not be as bad as what we, when young, read in the differing circumstances of the past.' And a delegate observed that according to some psychologists, comics 'a constituted a safety valve for young people'.¹⁹⁸ The NZEI concluded that '[c]omics have become part of the daily life of both child and adult.... They cover a wide range of types from the banal to the educational, from the innocuous to the obnoxious'. It noted objections to the medium, including inferior format and presentation, an 'undue emphasis by some on violence, horror or sex' and inadequate reading content. Yet this conference, consisting mainly of classroom teachers and principals, those (apart from parents) most actively involved with, and knowledgeable about, youthful behaviour and influences, adjudged that '[m]ost comics are innocuous' and even recommended that they be used for educational purposes. Indeed, the NZEI declared: 'Comics are here to stay. Let us put them to good use'.¹⁹⁹ Even James K. Baxter, who taught for a time in the fifties, placed the American superhero comics that affronted Pearson within a great literary tradition. They were the latest, if 'crudest', embodiment of the 'Promethean legend', with the 'physical strength and all the equipment of the hero' of classical myth, and, crucially, immortal'.²⁰⁰

The appropriateness of these pragmatic attitudes towards comics and their educational and social impact becomes apparent in the light of a survey of Wellington College students' reading habits carried out in 1952.²⁰¹ The results suggested that comics

¹⁹⁶ Memorandum from the Inspector of Schools for the acting Director of Education, 11 May 1949, p.3, E2 Box 683 11/1/16, ANZ

¹⁹⁷ *National Education*, 2 July, 1951, p.212

¹⁹⁸ *National Education*, 2 July, 1951, p.212-213

¹⁹⁹ 'Comics' and the New Zealand Educational Institute, M.M.Munro to Education Dept. Committee, 3 March, 1952, p.2, E2 Box 683 11/1/16, ANZ

²⁰⁰ James K. Baxter, 'Choice of Belief in Modern Society', *Canta*, 9 April 1952, p.1

²⁰¹ Wellington College was a boys' school. The survey involved all students at 2nd year (202) and 'Upper Fifts and Lower 6ths' (171) levels answering the questionnaire – a total of 373 students. 'No comment was made before or after, no collusion was permitted, and no names were noted, so the result could be called a fairly accurate estimate. On form

did not entice New Zealand youth into a habit of reading salacious literature. Ten per cent of the second year students claimed not to read any comics at all, a proportion that rose to twenty-five per cent amongst fourth year students. The most popular comic types amongst the younger cohort were not American horror and war comics, but Walt Disney, Classics Illustrated²⁰² and super-hero comics, along with the English publication *Champion*, which featured a mix of sport and British military themes. All but *Champion* retained their popularity with the older cohort. Publications adjudged by the survey to be in the 'Crime & Detective' category were read by a third of the second year students, and thirty per cent of their seniors. Cowboy-Western themed comics attracted almost forty per cent of second-year students, falling sharply to twenty percent of their older counterparts. In an indication that the leisurely interests of New Zealand teenage males in the 1950s were not entirely confined to sport, twenty per cent of the younger cohort and ten percent of the older read 'Teenage Romances'. Those publications classified by the survey as 'Pictures and jokes of a Dubious Quality' were popular. For example, forty per cent of the second-year and almost half of the fourth-year students read *Laughs* magazine, a collection of risqué jokes. The pin-up / humour magazine *Burlesk* was read by a quarter of junior and senior students alike.²⁰³

Unless one regards an adolescent interest in bawdy humour and the physical attributes of the opposite sex as scandalous and immoral, then the survey provides no evidence to suggest that New Zealand male teenagers' comic-reading habits were pernicious. This survey, along with the views of groups such NZEI and the Schools' Inspectorate, strongly indicates that New Zealand's youth were not threatened with degeneracy induced by a deluge of vile pornography and visual violence from an educationally emanating from the United States. Hence some educators rejected the unsubstantiated claims that such literature was without redeeming educational, literary and psychological merit. Others rejected the elitist posturing and politically motivated arguments of the likes of Scott, Pearson, and Hilliard, recognizing that such American comics were not flooding into the dominion, nor were they menacing the moral and sexual health of the nation's young.

given, periodicals all deliberately mixed to avoid grouping of types'. 'Notes on Periodical-reading of 2nd and 4th year boys', Wellington College, 6 March, 1952, E2 Box 683 11/1/16, ANZ

²⁰² Classic Illustrated comics presented literary 'classics' such as *Moby Dick*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Oliver Twist* in comic strip format.

²⁰³ 'Notes on Periodical-reading'. Wellington College

XIV

The immediate postwar history of New Zealand is illuminated by a study of the contemporary local discourses about American comics. These not only reveal profound disagreements about the effects of American-sourced media on New Zealanders. They also disclose an emerging postwar debate about the dominion's cultural identity, an ongoing re-evaluation of our traditional cultural relationship with the United Kingdom. Significantly, these processes all occurred at a time of technological, economic and strategic upheaval. The impact of American popular culture, be it comics, music or movies, was a global phenomenon, with New Zealand as part of an international nexus of mass media.

The postwar reception in New Zealand of 'comics' was therefore more concerned with 'underlying issues than it was with the specific matter of comics'.²⁰⁴ Perceptions of national identity were important: the popularity and ubiquity of this American medium symbolised the overthrow of traditional British cultural dominance at the very time when Britain's strategic preeminence in the Pacific had been replaced by the United States. Such anxieties were part of a larger apprehension about the social and cultural signals transmitted by American comics. Also to the forefront were concerns about the alleged threat that they presented to the mental, moral and behavioural processes of children and adolescents. More specifically, American comics were represented by influential members of elite groups in New Zealand as undermining and endangering the roles and work of parents, teachers and clergy in children's upbringing and education. This feature paralleled a postwar trend in western Europe and the United States, whereby aesthetics were becoming closely linked with ethics and pedagogics, while aesthetic products, including comics and films, were judged in terms of their perceived educational effects.²⁰⁵ Concern over comics also reflected apprehensions by civic guardians who looked askance at the increased leisure time and money being spent on movies, records and comics in the postwar decade.

The local reception of American comics and pulp magazines also highlights some obscured features of New Zealand's postwar social and cultural landscapes. Crucially, it manifests how various opinion-making elites felt threatened by a raucous, commercialised

²⁰⁴ Graeme Osborne uses this description in his 'Comics Discourse in Australia and Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent*' in Lent, *Pulp Demons*, pp.155-156

²⁰⁵ See Jovanovic and Ulrich, esp. pp.97-8 and p.111 for a discussion of this feature in West Germany.

American culture that vociferously proclaimed its popular ethos. The comics controversy suggests that for some of these claims-makers, on both left and right, the spirit of egalitarianism, that much-trumpeted feature of New Zealand life, was strongly held in check by their abiding suspicions about the intelligence, judgement and maturity of the New Zealand populace as a whole. Such people confronted an awkward problem. Comics, like swing music and Hollywood movies, were undeniably popular with most New Zealanders. However, their fiercest critics included those who most publicly proclaimed their commonality with the multitude and most vociferously declared their attachment to democratic principles. The New Zealand public's preference for American cultural forms meant that the cultural elitists on the left insisted that the public had been misled or duped, that American capitalist media had stamped its cultural imprint on them. New Zealanders, these critics argued, had been unwittingly forced to act against their own best cultural interests, which of course meant progressing from low culture towards high culture. As in Plato's *Republic*, censorship and interdiction of 'unsuitable' cultural material would remove temptation, while education and guidance from the cultural elites would condition the population into superior cultural habits.²⁰⁶ These tactics also provided opportunities for these cultural guardians to advance their own political, social and religious agendas, as well as expand their employment horizons. Such strategies also protected the guardians' bourgeois standards of taste as well as their roles as monitors of cultural change attempting to control and limit the impact of American cultural modes. In Gramscian terms, this was a hegemonic struggle to see which ideological and cultural schema would dominate in the postwar years.

This chapter has attempted to locate New Zealand responses to American comics within a global framework, as part of an international postwar and Cold War setting in which concerns about the roles and implication of American culture were a predominant feature. In the next chapter, I will approach these responses from a more specific perspective: examining the 1954 controversy over so-called 'juvenile immorality' in order to investigate the role that concerns about American comics and pulps played in that debate and also to explore postwar New Zealand cultural politics.

²⁰⁶ These attitudes are also to be found in the Massey Commission's Report on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences of 1951. See Paul Litt, *The Muses, the Masses, and the Massey Commission* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992)

CHAPTER FIVE

‘AMERICAN’ COMICS AND CULTURAL POLITICS IN 1954

I

The best-known New Zealand discourses about American comics occurred during the election year of 1954. They focus on the events associated with the National government's appointment of a Special Committee on Moral Delinquency in Children and Adolescents.¹ These events, severely compressed in time, provide a case study with which to examine in closer detail reactions to one particular form of American culture. The inquiry, and the role that comics played within the context of that inquiry, highlight an important postwar phenomenon: the political ramifications of concerns about the perceived insidious influence of American culture on youthful behaviour. Affinities with events and legislation in Canada, Australia, Britain and western Europe also demonstrate that such concerns and reactions were transnational.²

The flurry of contention in 1954 reveals that these anxieties transcended New Zealand political party lines. Yet they also functioned as markers of political ideology between Labour and National, as well as provoking contention within National's ranks. According to the mythology, Prime Minister Sidney Holland's National government exploited these issues for electoral advantage, intending to gain a 'highly visible role' in order to 'legitimise the public concern and panic'.³ This thesis argues instead that Holland's aim was to contain and defuse the situation lest it distract voters' attention from what National considered to be its electoral trump card: its advocacy of a consumerist economy.

The circumstances surrounding the establishment of the committee, namely the scandalous combination of alleged youthful debauchery in the Hutt Valley and the coincidental Parker-Hulme teenage murder case in Christchurch, provided a rich humus for the growth of political opportunism, journalistic speculation and moral posturing. The incident that precipitated the establishment of the Mazengarb inquiry first emerged to public notice on 6 July 1954, at the Hutt Valley Magistrates court, where eight youths appeared on

¹ Oswald Mazengarb, Q.C. headed the inquiry, which became known as the Mazengarb inquiry / committee. Membership of the committee is discussed below.

² Chris Brickell's article 'Sexuality, Morality and Society' in Giselle Byrnes, ed, *The New Oxford History of New Zealand* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp.473-476, briefly outlines this global trend in matters sexual and moral.

³ Janet M. Soler, "Drifting Towards Moral Chaos": the 1954 Mazengarb Report - a Moral Panic Over "Juvenile Immorality", (M.Phil.thesis, Massey University, 1988), p.107

fourteen charges of unlawful carnal knowledge and five of indecent assault. At this hearing, the police prosecutor claimed that investigations had ‘revealed a shocking degree of immoral conduct among adolescents’ in the area.⁴

The aftermath of the Hutt Valley / Hulme-Parker events paralleled that displayed six years earlier in Canada. In Peace River, British Columbia, two youths accused of robbery-murder blamed their crime on the influence of American crime comics.⁵ In Canada, as in New Zealand, anti-comics lobbyists immediately demanded the respective governments take immediate action to end the influx of ‘rubbish’ from the U.S. In both countries, the publicity attending the respective events provoked calls from child-saver groups and moral and cultural guardians for greater parental supervision of their children’s reading and activities, and also increased concerns about the content of comics.⁶

The idea of an official investigation into adolescent ‘immorality’ and its causes in New Zealand did not originate with the National government. Instead, it came on 8 July from the Hutt Valley High School’s board of governors, indignant at false accusations being circulated about the school and its staff and pupils.⁷ On 12 July Holland declared that a ‘grave social problem had been unearthed’, and that a ‘government inquiry on adolescents’ would be established in order to investigate ‘conditions and influences that tend to undermine standards of sexual morality of children and adolescents in New Zealand....’⁸

⁴ In 1950 a fundamentalist religious group had made unsubstantiated allegations about the immoral behaviour of Hutt schoolchildren and two years later a magistrate investigated further allegations of delinquency amongst schoolchildren of the area. Reaction to these earlier events was limited and muted. However, the impact of this new scandal on public opinion was exacerbated by its occurrence a fortnight after two Christchurch schoolgirls bludgeoned one of their mothers to death. This combination of youthful debauchery and matricide proved irresistible to both journalists and moral entrepreneurs. The latter included the National Council of Women, the Auckland Diocesan Synod and the Inter-Church Council on Public Affairs (ICCPA). Media and moralists alike joined in questioning the ethics and behaviour of the postwar generation of young New Zealanders. Presumed causes of such ‘immorality’ and delinquency’ ranged from comics and other ‘American’ media to lack of discipline in schools to working mothers. Transcript of evidence from E.H. Compton, Commissioner of Police, MS Papers 2384, Folder 01, Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL); *Evening Post*, 6 July 1954, p.18; *Christchurch Star-Sun*, 6 July 1954, p.1; *New Zealand Herald*, July 1954 p.7; p.15; *Auckland Star*, 1 October 1954, p.2; *Truth*, 20 December 1950, p.16; *People’s Voice*, 21 July 1954, p.6

⁵ The murder occurred near Dawson Creek, a key junction in the construction of the Alaska Highway by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1942. Large numbers of American military had poured into the area to build the Highway, which effectively removed much of Peace River’s isolation from the outside world. Jonathan Swainger, ‘American Crime Comics as Villains: an Incident From Northern Canada’, *Legal Studies Forum*, Vol.22, 1998, pp.215-221

⁶ Swainger, ‘Crime Comics’, pp.215-6; 224-6

⁷ *Christchurch Star-Sun*, 9 July 1954, p.18; *Evening Post*, 9 July 1954, p.6

⁸ The school’s Board of Governors asked the Minister of Education to institute an inquiry ‘by people with expertise in child psychology and child welfare’ to determine where responsibility for child delinquency should be placed and what steps should be taken to prevent further occurrences. Holland studied police reports that weekend, and conferred with the Police Commissioner. Early next week, Cabinet established a committee of five ministers to draw up terms of reference for an inquiry. *Star-Sun*, 9 July 1954, p.18; *Evening Post*, 9 July

This inquiry became known as the Mazengarb committee. Best described as ‘a committee of worthies’,⁹ it was chaired by a prominent lawyer and National party member, Oswald Mazengarb.¹⁰ His committee colleague, Somerville, described him as ‘sympathetic to the Government’. Somerville also regarded Mazengarb as ‘a puritan moralist with a simplistic view of society based on the Ten Commandments’.¹¹

The constantly recycled stereotype of Mazengarb’s committee as consisting of reactionary, inconsequential lightweights participating in a National government plot to exacerbate voters’ fears in an election year is a myth. It is as invalid as the equally enduring fiction that the inquiry’s membership lacked any expertise in education and youthful behaviour.¹² Redmer Yska, for example, alleges the committee contained no social workers, educationalists, or those experienced in dealing with ‘problem’ adolescents.¹³ Yet it included an experienced and progressive principal of a major state school, a prominent clergyman with interests in education and social problems, a psychologist who headed the Child Hygiene Division of the Department of Health, and a J.P. who specialised in Children’s Court work and whose husband was a prominent trade unionist.¹⁴

Generalisations of members as ‘nervous conservatives’ with “hopelessly reactionary notions’ are also unfounded.¹⁵ A study of inquiry transcripts and comments reveals a

1954, p.6; *Star-Sun*, 13 July 1954, p.10; *Evening Post*, 13 July 1954, p.11; *New Zealand Free Lance*, 21 July 1954, p.4; *Star-Sun*, 13 July 1954, p.10; 20 July 1954, p.3

⁹ Philippa Mein Smith, *A Concise History of New Zealand*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.190

¹⁰ Mazengarb, a Q.C. and author of legal texts, had stood unsuccessfully for National in the 1938 general election. In 1951 he was appointed to the Legislative Council by Holland as one of the ‘suicide squad’ to vote for that body’s abolition. Mazengarb was also one of the earliest campaigners for what eventually became the Ombudsman. *Star-Sun*, 20 July 1954, p.11

¹¹ Somerville, a former chaplain with the 19th Regiment at Cassino, was the was minister of the prestigious St.Andrew’s Church, The Terrace Wellington, chairman of the Interchurch Committee on Public Affairs and also convener of the Public Questions committee of the Assembly of the New Zealand Presbyterian Church. He later became Master of Knox College, Dunedin, and Chancellor of the University of Otago. J.S. Somerville, *Jack in the Pulpit: an Autobiography*, (Dunedin: John McIndoe, 1987), pp.133-4; Finlay MacDonald, ‘A Shaky Moral High Ground,’ *Sunday Star-Times*, 27 May, 2007, p. A10; MS Papers 2384, Folder 03, B3; D3; Folder 02, 3V2, ATL

¹² Redmer Yska claims that it included no educators, social workers or anyone with experience dealing with adolescents, and Dalley maintains that ‘only one had any professional experience with juvenile delinquency’. Redmer Yska, *All Shook Up: the Flash Bodgie and the Rise of the New Zealand Teenager in the Fifties* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1993), p.70; Bronwyn Dalley, *Family Matters: Child Welfare in Twentieth Century New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1998), p.181

¹³ Yska, *All Shook Up*, p.70

¹⁴ Apart from Mazengarb, the inquiry’s members were: Dr Gordon Mcleod, psychologist and Director of the Child Hygiene Division of the Department of Health, Lucy O’Brien, the President of the Catholic Women’s League, J.G. Leggat, Principal of Christchurch Boys’ High School, Nigel Stace, owner of a large Christchurch engineering firm and President of the New Zealand Junior Chamber of Commerce, the Rev. John Somerville, Chairman of the Inter-Church Council on Public Affairs and Rhoda Bloodworth, a J.P. with expertise in Children’s Court work, wife of a trade union official.

¹⁵ MacDonald, ‘Shaky Moral High Ground, p. A10

committee of feisty and independent members. They held a broad spectrum of political, religious and social attitudes, ranging from liberal and secular to reactionary and fundamentalist. Some, like Mazengarb and O'Brien, were critical of modern educational and social trends, frowning on contraception and working mothers, and favouring strict media censorship. Leggat, Somerville and Stace, on the other hand, were sharply critical of submissions blaming 'delinquency' on female promiscuity, coeducational schools, working mothers and declining morals. Somerville, like Leggat and Stace, was much more liberal than Mazengarb in his outlook. He declared that 'I found myself resisting the moralistic stance of the chairman on many counts and allying myself instead with the pragmatic stance of members like Jim Leggat'. Somerville admired Nash, whom he describes as 'warm, human and understanding ... amiable and open, unlike [Holland].' He disliked Holland, with whom he had clashed during the 1951 waterfront dispute when he led a delegation that complained about the government's emergency regulations, describing the Prime Minister's responses as 'fairly brutal ... peremptory'.¹⁶ Thus the inquiry's membership hardly constituted a cadre of reactionaries compliant with the government's wishes.

Far from being an attempt by the government to excite public opinion about comics, juvenile delinquency and youthful immorality, the inquiry was an exercise in downplaying public concerns and minimising publicity about these issues. The government ensured that the committee constituted an 'inquiry-lite'. As one member admitted, it was a 'low-ranking exercise'.¹⁷ It lacked the legal and political status of a Royal Commission of Inquiry. It was unable to summon or cross-examine those who made submissions, who had no legal counsel or provide evidence under oath. Nor could it call expert witnesses. Much of the evidence presented was secondary or hearsay; some bordered on the sectarian or vindictive. The inquiry was held *in camera*, away from public and media attention. None of the children involved in the Hutt Valley incidents was interviewed.¹⁸ Nash, the leader of the Opposition endorsed this crucial decision: 'publicity in such matters stimulated curiosity in a harmful way'.¹⁹ Holland's quick establishment of the inquiry had the crucial effect of diverting public concerns about juvenile misbehaviour and its causes away from media by providing citizens with an opportunity to voice their apprehensions to the inquiry when it visited the three main centres. It also enabled him and other government ministers to decline comment

¹⁶ Somerville, *Jack in the Pulpit*, pp. 132-133

¹⁷ Somerville, *Jack in the Pulpit*, p.134

¹⁸ *Star-Sun*, 20 July 1954, p.3; Bernadette Lavelle, "'Youth Without Purpose": Juvenile Delinquency in New Zealand in the 1950s', M.A. thesis, (University of Otago, 1990), p.46

¹⁹ NZPD, Vol. 304 (1954), p.1315

in parliament or elsewhere on potentially awkward issues on the grounds that the committee was currently considering such matters.²⁰

II

Most academic analyses of the inquiry recycle variations of the theme of moral panic. Such accounts feature an intemperate public rushing into judgement, seduced by sensationalising media and misled by an unscrupulous government intent on exaggerating the socially and morally dangerous effects of comics in order to gain political advantage.²¹ Instead, I argue that the inquiry was a culmination of several years campaigning by groups of cultural and political lobbyists who made unsubstantiated and hyperbolic claims about comics and their consequences in order to advance their particular socio-cultural-political interests.²² It signified an attempt by moral and cultural entrepreneurs to leverage the recent controversy overseas following the publication and consequent worldwide publicity earlier in 1954 of Fredric Wertham's claims attributing youthful delinquency to the effects of reading comics and pulps. The fact that 1954 was an election year provided opportunities for these groups to assert their influence and pressurise a reluctant and justifiably skeptical government to insulate New Zealanders from one of the key elements of American culture.

These campaigners fell into two groups. There were those on the left who, like their overseas counterparts, used comics and their supposed deleterious effects on youth as an ideological weapon to attack American cultural imperialism and its alleged corrosive consequences for other societies and cultures. Another group included many who belonged to religious, civic or educational elites, often conservative, but all claiming to protect the moral and aesthetic interests of the young and the culturally deprived. In New Zealand, as in Australia, and Canada six years earlier, clergy, educationists, womens' and parents'

²⁰ e.g. *Star-Sun*, 31 July 1954, p.2

²¹ The most sustained example of this approach is to be found in Roy Shuker, Roger Openshaw and Janet Soler's *Youth, Media and Moral Panic in New Zealand* (Palmerston North: Massey University Department of Education, 1990), Chapter 2, 'Youth, Media and Moral Panic'. A recent interpretation modifies the traditional approach to the moral panic thesis. Laurie Guy largely ignores the issue of comics and other American media and their alleged impact on youthful behaviour. He does, however, reject contentions by Janet Soler and others that local newspapers conducted a 'beat-up' by orchestrating public concerns about juvenile delinquency. Laurie Guy, 'Moral Panic' or Pejorative Labelling? Rethinking the Mazengarb Inquiry into Underage Sex in the Hutt Valley in 1954', in *Journal of Religious History* Vol.33, No.4 (December 2009), pp.435 – 451

²² Shuker et al, *Youth, Media* specifically refer to what they call the 'vested interests' of religious groups in exploiting the comics/delinquency issue, pp.22-23. They also note on p.27 that 'a small group of professionals ...had previously expressed doubts about ...the need for an "alarmist" view about "immorality"'

organisations dominated and drove the discourse over comics and youth.²³ One of the most influential of the New Zealand groups was the Inter-Church Council on Public Affairs (ICCPA), whose Chairman, J.C. Somerville, was one of the Mazengarb inquiry's members.

The ICCPA's attempts to influence government on socio-cultural matters illuminate the cultural politics of the postwar decade. From its formation in 1941, the ICCPA had warily scanned the moral horizon for irruptions of those American cultural perils, 'comics' and 'movies'. During the war it was concerned about Sunday screenings of films for servicemen in Wellington. Months before the war ended it discussed closing public bars 'on the day of the cessation of hostilities', urged stricter film censorship and fretted about reports of youthful delinquency.²⁴ This particular group of moral and cultural lobbyists exemplifies Augustine Brannigan's insistence on the key role played by 'morally conservative constituents' in seeking to impose their views on government policies.²⁵

The Holland government's response to the ICCPA campaign during 1950-1954 was revealing. It sought to provide the maximum of reassurance with the minimum of action, to deal with the matter by administration and prevarication rather than agitation and legislation. Holland's appointment of the Mazengarb inquiry followed this template. The key feature of this process was for ministers to express sympathy with the ICCPA's concerns about the social implications of comics and promise forthcoming legislation to ban or censor these American cultural vices. In practice, however, the government pursued administrative solutions. It preferred to dampen, not inflame, the concerns proclaimed by moral entrepreneurs such as the ICCPA from the late 1940s. Thus in 1950, when an ICCPA delegation requested that the government place a 'complete ban' on comics, Hilda Ross, the Minister with responsibility for the welfare of women and children, sympathised with them. Although she promised to 'get other Ministers lined up on it', nothing eventuated.²⁶ The next year, when a joint delegation from the Council and representatives from the New Zealand Educational Institute and the National Council of Women met the Education

²³ Jon Swainger, 'Breaking the Peace: Fictions of the Law-Abiding Peace River Country, 1930 -50', *BC Studies: the British Columbia Quarterly*, No.119 (Autumn 1998), pp.5-25, Alexander Turnbull Library, ATL

²⁴ e.g., Minute-Book: October 20 1944 – May 31 1946: Minutes 20 October 1944; 16 February, 1945; 27 April 1945; 25 May 1945, MS y 1837, ATL

²⁵ Augustine Brannigan, 'Crimes From Comics: Social and Political Determinants of Reform of the Victorian Obscenity Law 1938-1954', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, Vol.19, 1986, pp.35-36; 40

²⁶ Minutes, 30 June 1950, Minutes, July 1950, Minute Book 4, MS y 1837, ATL. See also Shuker et al, *Youth, Media*, p.86

minister, R.M. Algie, to urge censorship of comics, he professed 'sympathetic interest'.²⁷ Although the ICCPA was assured that 'projected legislation' was ready in 1952, none was forthcoming.²⁸ Instead, the government established an inter-departmental committee on 'worthless and indecent literature'.²⁹ In a sign of the increasing pressure that cultural and moral lobbyists were putting on the government, that year the New Zealand Federation of University Women informed the Minister of Customs that they wanted to

add our protest to those of other interested associations against the use of overseas funds for the importation into New Zealand of a degrading type of literature –the pulp magazine or comic.

We do not inveigh against the comic strip as such, for we recognize that strips, like the cinema and radio, as a form of entertainment and means of conveying information, or forming attitudes, have come to stay. Their enormous popularity, with children and with adolescent-minded adults especially, could be turned to good account.³⁰

Another source of opposition to comics involved the commercial fears of New Zealand printing firms about competition from their trans-Tasman counterparts. These concerns were concealed behind ostensibly civic-minded concerns about restricting imported pernicious literature. For example, in July 1952 the Times Printing Company informed the Minister of Education that it was 'cancelling' certain comics: 'we readily agree that they leave much to be desired'. These withdrawn titles included *Teenage Romance*, *Invisible Avenger*, *Justice*, *I Hate Crime* and *Black Magic*. However, several of the listed 'titles' were not comics or pulps at all; they were Australian radio serials,³¹ an indication of the unreliability of contemporary accusations about comics and their content. The company's managing director also complained that other companies were 'allowed to swamp the local market with stories of crime and horror in the extreme'.³² Such vilification

²⁷ Minute Book 4, August 1951; 28 September, 1951; 23 November 1951, MS y 1837; Minute Book 4, 28 September 1951; 23 November 1951; Annual Report 1951 attached to Minutes of 6 December 1951, MS y 1837, ATL

²⁸ Minute Book 4, 20 March 1952; 28 November 1952, MS y 1837, ATL

²⁹ This committee consisted of representatives from the Police, Justice, Education and Customs departments, as well as the Crown Law Office. Evening Post, 24/6/52, p.8; reports on meetings of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Worthless and Indecent Literature, 11 March 1952 and 2 September, 1952, Film Censor's Office, IA 83 15, ANZ; A.C.Burns, "Some aspects of censorship: a survey of censorship law and practice in New Zealand from 1841 to 1963, mainly concerning the control of indecent publications" (Victoria University of Wellington, 1968 M.A. thesis), p.92

³⁰ Letter from President of the Federation of University Women to Minister of Customs, 11 June 1952, E2, Box 683 11/1/16, ANZ

³¹ e.g. see Phil Charley, Wayne Mac and Steve Ahern, 'A History of Radio in Australia' in Ahern, Steve, ed, *Making Radio: a Practical Guide to Working in Radio in the Digital Age*, 3rd ed., (Crows Nest, NSW:Allen & Unwin, 2011), p.8

³² Managing Director, Times Printing Works, Auckland to Minister of Education, 21 July 1952. Film Censor's Office, E2 Box 683 11/1/16, ANZ

of Australian-printed comics and their local distributors was evidence of commercial rivalry rather than proof of salacious content.

Another motive for maligning comics belonged to the film censor, Gordon Mirams. An inveterate networker, Mirams lobbied extensively in the early 1950s to widen top-ranking departmental officials, such as the Secretary of Internal Affairs, for an expansion of his cinematic censorship role to include comics. He urged that he be included in any supervisory body that might be established. This would have enabled him to become the focus of attempts to regulate and proscribe American cultural influences. In 1952 Mirams succeeded in being included in the Inter-Departmental committee investigating comics.³³

On 2 September 1952 that committee considered the suggestions put forward at this meeting, noting that participants had agreed that ‘a proportion of comics in the market’ accentuated violence, crime, horror, sex and racial prejudice. The committee recommended that all comics be registered and that it be an offence to print, sell or exchange any not registered. It also recommended that a ‘Comic Control Committee’ be established.³⁴ Once again the government failed to implement these two proposed actions, rejecting the opportunity to appease influential civic and religious interest groups. Instead, it decided to encourage voluntary cooperation from booksellers and importers in raising the standards of comics. In 1953, while the government again promised the ICCPA it would ban comics, it preferred to seek administrative solutions, appointing a Literary Advisory Committee to screen imports of comics and other literature.³⁵ Just before the Hutt Valley and Parker-Hulme scandals emerged in 1954 Algie expressed ‘considerable doubt’ that legislation was a solution to the problem of offensive literature.³⁶

III

Investigation of the 1954 uproar has either ignored or downplayed the Labour opposition’s crucial role in the controversy over comics and youthful behaviour, and the resulting legislation. Although Laurie Guy maintains that ‘[t]he looming election was a

³³ Memo from Secretary of Internal Affairs to Mirams, 20 March 1952, Film Censor’s Office, IA 83 15, ANZ

³⁴ Managing Director, Times Printing Works, Auckland to Minister of Education, 21 July 1952, Film Censor’s Office, E2 Box 683 11/1/16, ANZ

³⁵ 1953 Annual Report, included in Minutes of 20 November 1953, Minute Book 5, MS y 1838, ATL; Burns, pp.94-95; *Truth*, 19 May 1954, p. 22. The committee’s members were Ian Gordon, Professor of English at Victoria University, the historian R.M. Burdon and Irene Wilson, a principal and secretary of the Student Christian Movement.

³⁶ New Zealand Parliamentary Debates, (NZPD), Vol. 303, (1954), p.388

likely a driver of much that ensued politically’, he pays little attention to Labour’s pivotal role in attempting to exploit the issue for electoral advantage. Instead he argues that ‘in some measure the inquiry was conducted to serve the purposes of the government’.³⁷ Yet months before the Hutt Valley affair had emerged into full public gaze there were signs that the Labour opposition saw opportunities to embarrass the government over the conjoined issue of comics and delinquency. By late 1953 the pro-Labour newspaper *The Standard* insisted in a front page article that despite what it claimed was a ‘public outcry’, legislation to prevent children obtaining crime, horror and sex comics had not occurred. ‘Government action, if any is intended, is long overdue’.³⁸

A study of Labour’s reactions reveals how it seized upon the subject of comics and youthful delinquency as an ideal opportunity to attack the government in an election year. Speaking in parliament the day after Holland announced the Mazengarb inquiry’s establishment, Labour’s Henry May introduced a theme soon to be echoed by subsequent Opposition speakers. He claimed that youthful ‘immorality’, exemplified by the Hutt Valley affair, resulted ultimately from the government’s economic and social policies. ‘The flood of suggestive comics and magazines and pornographic literature,’ which May alleged caused such delinquency, was caused by National’s removal of the Labour government’s strict import controls. He not only demanded a ban on imports of ‘these nasty books’; he also urged stricter censorship of film and radio content.³⁹

Labour was striking at a weak point in the government’s armour by blaming it for what it declared to be a rise in juvenile crime and a decline in youthful morality. Labour’s claims about moral delinquency reiterated a popular feature of its policies in the 1930s and 1940s: the humane articulation of concern for social, moral and family issues. While National claimed its gradual removal of import controls stimulated the economy, reduced bureaucratic restrictions and enhanced personal freedoms, May and other Labour parliamentarians insisted that this had come at a terrible social and moral cost – corrupting the nation’s youth by allowing the importation of pernicious culture. This culture, of course, was predominantly identified with the U.S.A. Nash and other Opposition parliamentarians piously insisted that the Labour government’s import-licensing system had prevented ‘the importation of any pulp magazines depicting horror, crime, or sex....’⁴⁰ Labour’s stance also

³⁷ Guy, ‘“Moral Panic”,’ p.438

³⁸ ‘The Standard’, 7 October, 1953, p.1, clipping, Film Censor’s Office, IA 83 15, ANZ

³⁹ NZPD, Vol. 303, (1954), p.375

⁴⁰ NZPD, Vol. 304, (1954), p.1313

aligned it with moral entrepreneurs like the ICCPA and the Baptist Union. The Anglican church's journal, *Church and People*, for example, declared during 1954 that 'precious young minds are being poisoned by 'the devil in ink',⁴¹ in the guise of comics and magazines. Even worse, the display and sale of such media meant that 'respectable people are constantly confronted with blatant vulgarity.'⁴² Thus attempts to defend standards of bourgeois taste were concealed within the drapery of allegations about moral standards and the endangerment of young minds.

National was well aware that such concerns about the purported effects of imported American media presented the government with a 'serious worry.'⁴³ National's newspaper, *Freedom*, accused Labour of 'noisily and nastily' blaming the reported outbreaks of 'teenage precocity' on government policies.⁴⁴ Holland had to defuse an issue with the potential to explode National's intention to concentrate its electioneering focus on economic and consumer matters. But Labour's insistence that the alleged 'flood' of American comics under National's stewardship of the nation could be prevented by a return to stringent import controls also had its dangers for Labour. It appeared to confirm National's claims that Labour was obsessed with 'morality censorship by bureaucrats', petty-minded interfering in citizens' lives.⁴⁵ During the 1954 parliamentary session Labour M.P.s adopted increasingly stultified stances on 'moral' issues. Nash and Arnold ('bible-banging wowsers' according to trade unionist F.P. Walsh)⁴⁶ demanded that the age at which one could purchase condoms be raised to eighteen; both deplored their use as contraceptives even by married couples.⁴⁷ Nash also urged that the age of marriage be raised to eighteen.⁴⁸ The government used such views to ridicule Labour's leaders as moralising, interfering and self-righteous on matters of media and morality. Holland, for example, noted that a book Nordmeyer claimed to be 'imported filth' was published in Nash's own electorate and contained nothing more harmful than illustrations of families at a beach.⁴⁹ And Labour had little option but to support the

⁴¹ In the Canadian House of Commons in 1948, the Conservative M.P. Daniel McIvor referred to American crime comics as part of the 'satanic majesty's plans for youth'. Brannigan, 'Delinquency, Comics', p.57

⁴² *Church and People*, 2 August 1954, p.4

⁴³ *New Zealand Herald*, 14 July 1954 p.8

⁴⁴ *Freedom*, 4 August 1954, p.2

⁴⁵ *Truth*, 23 January 1946, p.12

⁴⁶ Margaret Clark, ed, *Three Labour Leaders: Nordmeyer, Kirk, Rowling* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2001), p.17

⁴⁷ NZPD, Vol. 304, (1954), p.2015; p.2033

⁴⁸ NZPD, Vol. 304, (1954), p.2030

⁴⁹ NZPD, Vol. 304, (1954), p.1322

establishment of the Mazengarb inquiry,⁵⁰ which had been welcomed by civic and religious groups. The Auckland Diocesan Synod, for example, had commended the government's 'prompt action'.⁵¹

IV

The Address-in-Reply debate in parliament in July revealed not only that both government and opposition tried to manipulate the comics/delinquency issue to their respective advantage. It also showed a split in National ranks over the issue. Shortly before May attacked the government over the comics issue, National's D.M. Rae had asked a parliamentary question inquiring if Jack Watts, the Minister in Charge of Import Controls, intended to use import regulations to 'prohibit the import of poor-quality and sadistic pulp magazines and comics which have an injurious effect upon children and young people'. In his reply, Watts showed that even at this stage the government was unwilling to take the decisive action demanded by the anti-comics lobby. He answered that the suggestion had already been examined previously and adjudged unsuitable. Watts added that 'import control was not intended to be a form of censorship'.⁵² However, Hilda Ross, Minister for the Welfare of Women and Children, took a much more interventionist approach than her ministerial colleague. Immediately after May made his accusations in Parliament, she coolly appropriated Labour's demands for improved parental supervision and guidance of their children's moral and social development, and for more stringent censorship of comics. She metamorphosed May's 'flood' imagery. 'We have a fire blazing now', Ross announced, 'fed with the fuel of countless indecent publications. It is for us, the legislators of this country, to cut off the abundant supplies of that fad.'⁵³

Ironically, moral conservatives like Ross and May, with their cataclysmic metaphors and claims of the corrosive impact of 'comics' on youthful morals, were employing the same metaphoric language used by New Zealand's left, such as Elsie Locke and Bill Pearson. The *People's Voice*, for example, maintained that a 'TIDAL WAVE OF JUVENILE CRIME', generated by American culture in the form of comics and films, was 'flooding our

⁵⁰ Nordmeyer, for example, eventually praised the committee's report as 'a very good job. It should be commended for the decisions it had reached'. NZPD, Vol. 304, (1954), p.2013

⁵¹ *Church and People*, 2 August 1954, p.1

⁵² NZPD, Vol.303, (1954), p.238

⁵³ NZPD, Vol.304, (1954), pp.377-379

country' and inciting the nation's youth to delinquency.⁵⁴ Thus the anti-comics advocates and other moral entrepreneurs at both ends of the political spectrum persistently represented the youthful audiences of American culture as requiring their control and protection for both their moral and cultural welfare. In their argument, cultural threats to the nation's youth constituted a threat to the entire nation.⁵⁵ These New Zealanders not only employed the same rhetorical tropes used by their Canadian counterparts, who spoke of the 'flood of objectionable literature' that was transforming Canada into 'an open end[ed] sewer' for American filth.⁵⁶ They also shared with their Canadian counterparts a reliance on two crucial but unproven assumptions. The first was that obnoxious American comics were 'flooding' each nation;⁵⁷ the second that this inundation was a factor in what was claimed to be increasing rates of juvenile delinquency and immorality.⁵⁸ Yet in postwar Canada, as in New Zealand, there were those who pointed out the lack of evidence linking comics with crime and misconduct.⁵⁹

A wider perspective also reveals significant parallels between the two episodes. American comics were perceived by elements within both countries as an invasive force. The presence during the war of the American military in Canada's north and New Zealand's North Island provided physical proof of the arrival of American power in areas geographically isolated from global conflict. That presence, with its strategic, economic and cultural manifestations, also had implications for perceptions of local identity. It was now obvious that both nations were becoming part of a wider, Americanised culture. Those who feared this process used American comics as scapegoats in an attempt to assert their

⁵⁴ *People's Voice*, 14 April 1954, p.3; 10 February 1954, p.5

⁵⁵ See Mary L. Adams, 'Youth, Corruptibility, and English-Canadian Postwar Campaigns Against Indecency, 1948-1955' in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol.6 No.1 (July 1995), pp.89-117, on Canadian youth and media.

⁵⁶ The major difference was that whereas New Zealand anti-comics lobbyists described comics as 'pernicious', their Canadian counterparts preferred the term 'salacious'. Submission of the B.C. Provincial Congress of Canadian Women to Senate Committee on Salacious and Indecent Literature', 11 February, 1953, cited in Adams, 'Youth, Corruptibility', pp.106-7

⁵⁷ e.g. the M.P. for Cariboo (Peace River was in his electorate) claimed that 'this country was deluged with filth from the publishers of the United States'. Cited in Swainger, 'American Crime Comics', p.227.

⁵⁸ Fulton told Canada's House of Commons that these comics were an active cause of youthful crime in Canada, before admitting 'it is difficult to prove that these magazines do actually increase juvenile delinquency'. He argued that 'one can say that at least two coincidences go together: that there is an increase in juvenile delinquency and an increase in the circulation of this type of magazine in Canada'. Cited Swainger, 'American Crime Comics', p.224

⁵⁹ At the time the Fulton Bill was enacted in late 1949 the federal Attorney-General remained unconvinced that the link between comics and delinquency had been proven, and only two of his provincial colleagues supported the legislation. In 1948 Canada's Director-General of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene declared that 'It has never been established that crime or thrill stories either in movies, radio or comics have contributed to delinquency'. Swainger, 'American Crime Comics', p.224; 228; Adams, 'Youth, Corruptibility', p.97

perceived unique cultural sovereignty. They also tried to establish a fiction that perceived youthful delinquency and immorality were imported from abroad. Both in Canada and New Zealand those who lobbied against American comics preferred to insist that criminal behaviour was not inherent in the perceived pristine local communities, but came from the malign effects of an intrusive foreign source: American comics.⁶⁰

Although Openshaw and Shuker claim that Ross ‘spoke for the majority of Government members’, the parliamentary record shows otherwise.⁶¹ Her views were not representative of most National M.P.s who spoke on the issue. While James Roy praised Ross’s attitude, deploring ‘the social evils which ... have been revealed in our midst’, he also asserted that ‘by legislation we cannot make people good’.⁶² Several ministers, especially Charles Bowden and Ronald Algie, the Ministers of Customs and Education respectively, and also John Marshall, the Minister of Health, rejected Ross’s calls for stricter censorship. They noted the practical and legal difficulties of censorship as a means of combating ‘juvenile immorality’, pointed out the ethical dangers inherent in censorship and were dubious about the efficacy of legislation on such matters.⁶³

Other National M.P.s vigorously disputed the claims of Ross and May that comics were corrupting New Zealanders, and that consequently there was a cultural and social crisis involving the nation’s youth that required immediate legislative remedy. Rob Talbot and several fellow National backbenchers insisted that claims about juvenile immorality and offensive literature were exaggerated. ‘There was no reason for starting a scare,’ Dick Gerard insisted. ‘It was necessary to keep such things in perspective’, for such complaints had been made for years.⁶⁴ His colleague Tom Shand also took a pragmatic approach, arguing that moral and cultural standards were evolving: ‘there were things in everyday life that would have been considered indecent twenty years ago’.⁶⁵ Shand, Talbot and Gerard were among those National parliamentarians who insisted that youthful behaviour had not deteriorated as a result of comics or any other cultural import, and that wise parenting was required, not legislation.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ Swainger, ‘American Crime Comics’, discusses this feature in Canada, pp.226-31

⁶¹ Roy Openshaw and Roy Shuker, “‘Worthless and indecent literature’: comics and moral panic in early post-war New Zealand,” *History of Education Review*, Vol.1, No.16 (1987), p.8

⁶² NZPD, Vol. 304, (1954), p.445

⁶³ NZPD, Vol. 303, (1954), pp.387-8; NZPD, Vol. 304, (1954), pp.1312-1316

⁶⁴ NZPD, Vol.304, (1954) p.1328

⁶⁵ NZPD, Vol.304, (1954), p.1318

⁶⁶ NZPD, Vol.304, (1954), p.1317

National's newspaper *Freedom* endorsed their views. It scorned the attitudes, not only of Labour, but also Ross, derisively rejecting their claims that the Hutt scandal demonstrated the dangerous effects of comics on youthful behaviour. *Freedom* regarded such behaviour as part of the eternal cycle of generational conflict, a localised outbreak of 'alleged sexual precocity', involving only a 'minority...who mature earlier than is normal and behave in a way that is gravely unconventional.'⁶⁷ The current outcry was evidence, not of a fundamental societal problem but of Labour's willingness to treat the recent 'misdeeds of early developing girls and boys' as political ammunition.⁶⁸ National's journal also criticised both Ross and Labour for claiming juvenile delinquency was increasing, correctly pointing out the delinquency rate, in spite of comics, had declined to its 1935 level.⁶⁹

Freedom rejected Ross's preferred solution to controlling such literature – 'any kind of censorship is distasteful and it is definitely not the answer to the perennial problem of what is wrong with today's youth'. It also noted that no welfare organisation had instituted a test case to determine the indecency or otherwise of such material, observing there was 'no unanimity of opinion among school teachers, welfare organisations, religious teachers and so on about whether these so-called comics and trashy literature are directly responsible for juvenile immorality....' The journal's 'Women's Correspondent' searched local shops for examples of the offensive comics that Ross and Labour M.P.s claimed were available. Although critical of their idealisation of 'the marriage state and pure romantic love', she found 'some rough language, not much brutality' and concluded that they 'fell far short of the gamey fare the titles had led me to expect.'. She also observed that the rates of juvenile delinquency were now *declining* from their peak during the war years.⁷⁰

Holland quickly distanced himself from Ross's views, aligning himself more closely with those of *Freedom*, Algie and Shand. By mid-August he declared there was already 'ample provision in the law' for regulating imported literature, and that youthful misbehaviour was 'common in other countries as well as New Zealand', confined here to 'a

⁶⁷ *Freedom*, 4 August 1954, p.2

⁶⁸ *Freedom*, 4 August 1954, p.2 According to *Freedom*, the current outcry was evidence, not of a fundamental societal problem but of Labour's willingness to treat the recent 'misdeeds of early developing girls and boys' as political ammunition. If disturbing adolescent attitudes *did* exist, *Freedom* insisted they resulted from '14 years of Labour's assault on private property ownership and the general sapping of standards that that involved and the deliberate fostering of an impudent dislike of ordered authority.' *Freedom*, 4 August 1954, p.2

⁶⁹ *Freedom*, 8 September 1954, p.8; 18 August 1954, p.1; 8 September 1954, p.8. The Child Welfare Division also held this view at the time. Bronwyn Dalley, *Family Matters: Child Welfare in Twentieth Century New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1998), pp.190-1

⁷⁰ *Freedom*, 18 August 1954, p.1; 8 September 1954, p.8;

comparatively small section of our young people.’⁷¹ However, he accepted credit for the establishment of the inquiry, arguing it provided proof of his government’s pioneering initiative in social matters – ‘no other nation ... had dealt more fully with this moral problem’. The inquiry’s report, he claimed, was ‘already regarded as of great importance not only in New Zealand but in every country in the world’.⁷² As Bernadette Lavelle observes, Holland shrewdly presented the inquiry as an example of New Zealand as a ‘world leader and innovator in social policy’.⁷³ In effect, Holland was having a bet each way. Both his establishment of the inquiry, and Ross’s swift appropriation of Labour’s claims that there was a link between juvenile delinquency and ‘pernicious literature’, appealed to moral and cultural conservatives offended by new media. The more liberal and pragmatic attitudes of Algie, Bowden and key National backbenchers towards comics and generational relationships seemed more attuned to the changing sensibilities of the postwar generation of parents.

V

However, the comics/delinquency issue still presented Holland with potential problems in an election year. Several newspapers and journals, ranging from the profane (*Truth*) to the sacred (the *New Zealand Tablet*) demanded the government take action. *Truth* expected ‘urgent answers’ for issues arising from the ‘current revelation of widespread juvenile delinquency in New Zealand’⁷⁴ while the *Tablet* demanded ‘strong Government action backed by wise laws....’⁷⁵ Both the *Auckland Star* and the *Christchurch Star-Sun*, the afternoon newspaper of Holland’s home city, announced a ‘campaign to clean up the crude and salacious comics which are pouring into New Zealand.’⁷⁶ Both newspapers commissioned Gallup Polls (New Zealand Ltd) to survey several hundred children and adults in both cities, ‘using scientific and accurate methods’ in order to report on ‘attitudes and habits’ of parents and children of Christchurch and Auckland.⁷⁷ The surveys’ finding

⁷¹ NZPD, Vol. 304 (1954) p.1322

⁷² *Press*, 25 September 1954, p.6

⁷³ Lavelle, “‘Youth Without Purpose’”, p.108

⁷⁴ *New Zealand Truth*, 6 October 1954 p.44, cited Lavelle, “‘Youth Without Purpose’”, p.108

⁷⁵ *New Zealand Tablet*, 21 April 1954, p.9

⁷⁶ *Star-Sun*, 29 July 1954, p.1

⁷⁷ *Star-Sun*, 28 July 1954, p.1; *Star-Sun*, 21 July 1954, p.1; *Auckland Star*, 10 August 1954, p.1 The Gallup surveys appear to have been conducted in several sections over several weeks. The first section involved opinion on comics. This poll was confined to the comics issue. On 28 July, when this poll was published, the *Star-Sun* claimed that it was ‘authorised’ before the ‘recent events’ and ‘disclosures’. The tenor and register of

were released as page one articles with headlines such as *Comics Could Foster Crime Among Youth*.⁷⁸ The newspapers also printed demands from religious and civic leaders for immediate Government action. One clergyman insisted: 'We should get at the Government ... and put the boot in if they do not come up to scratch.'⁷⁹

The *Star-Sun*'s editor also put the boot in. He accused Customs Minister Charles Bowden of being 'out of touch with reality' for declaring that although many publications entering New Zealand were 'absolutely worthless, they are not indecent' and were 'mainly bought by adults, and not by children'. Bowden's conclusion that the effect of such literature 'was not really as great as believed by some', was, the newspaper declared,

calculated to drive the public to despair - or desperation. What the people want to know is what the Government intends to do about dirty comics, about vicious comics, about crime, sex and all the rest of it...The popular demand is: What are you going to do about it? The Government must give a positive answer.⁸⁰

Its answers, apart from the establishment of the inquiry, did not meet the demands of groups such as the Canterbury Housewives' Union. When the latter complained to Holland about morally poisonous comics, Holland tersely replied: 'I haven't seen them.' His Minister of Education informed the Union that he considered censorship of comics to be neither 'necessary [n]or desirable' and that control was 'mainly the responsibility of teachers and parents'. Thus even at the height of the controversy, Holland's government still exhibited the same reluctance to legislate against this purported menace that it had maintained for the last three years.⁸¹ He appears to have realised that the New Zealand public was concerned rather than panicked about the issues of 'pernicious' literature and juvenile 'immorality', and that they sought reassurance not retribution.

The two newspapers' campaign itself produced evidence supporting Holland's stance. Their Gallup polls revealed that most New Zealand parents' reactions to so-called juvenile delinquency and the comics 'menace' were restrained and appropriate rather than fearful and overwrought. Although eighty per cent of adult respondents agreed with the vague statement that 'special steps' needed to be taken about comics, they disagreed as to

this poll's questions, the commentary on the findings and some of the responses strongly suggest that at least part of it was taken *after* the 'disclosures'. The first results of the next rounds of polling, which involved parent-child relationships, sex education, etc did not begin to appear until a fortnight later. *Star-Sun*, 21 July 1954, p.1; 27 July 1954, p.1; 28 July 1954, pp.1-2

⁷⁸ *Auckland Star*, 10 September 1954, p.1

⁷⁹ *Star-Sun*, 3 Sept 1954, p.1

⁸⁰ NZPD, (1954) 304, p.1086; *Star-Sun*, 12 August 1954, p.2

⁸¹ *People's Voice*, 14 July 1954, 1954, p.7; 21 July 1954, p.6; *Star-Sun*, 7 July 1954, p.3; 6

what these steps should be. The pollsters observed that the dissenting minority felt that censorship of any kind was dangerous. Only eleven per cent of the adults wanted an outright ban on comics; just over half wanted a pre-sale scrutiny of their contents.⁸² The Gallup surveys also indicated that in the mid-fifties New Zealand youth had a surprisingly positive view of adolescent-parent relationships. Only one in ten of the youthful respondents found parents 'too strict'. Most children under fourteen even agreed that their choice of reading material should be selected by their parents. Indeed, most adolescents were much less critical of their parents than were adults themselves, while one survey found that most youngsters 'named their parents as their favourite people.' Parents welcomed opportunities for responsible, discussion of ... juvenile problems.' The 'majority of boys and girls, thanks to their parents,' one survey concluded, 'have healthy attitudes. They are not a "problem", nor do their parents have reason to reproach themselves....' These surveys suggest that the government was hardly facing what a recent academic text describes as a 'major panic about the behaviour of teenagers.' Nor was it confronting a generational crisis where 'teenagers terrorized a nation' and embittered youths rejected parental values and authority.⁸³ These findings were supported in a detailed report published by the New Zealand Library Association. Not only did the report doubt that the New Zealand public demanded action over comics. It also observed that although most parents regarded the issue with 'concern', they realistically placed it in the context of 'a modern world-wide tendency, and not something peculiar to New Zealand.'⁸⁴

The recent trials and verdicts in the Magistrates' Court cases of youths accused of the Hutt Valley offences also provided reassurance for both government and public that New Zealanders had little to fear from misbehaving adolescents turned feral by American comics. Newspaper reports of court evidence showed that the activities of the youths involved were largely confined to sporadic consensual sex (occasionally involving females just under consensual age), visiting milk-bars, going to cinemas, and drinking beer and smoking

⁸² *Star-Sun*, 28 July 1954, p.1; 11 August 1954, p.1; *Auckland Star*, 10 August 1954, p.1; 11 August 1954, p.1; *Auckland Star*, 10 August 1954, p.1; 11 August 1954, p.11; *Star-Sun*, 14 August 1954, p.1; *Star-Sun*, 7 August 1954, p.1; *Star--Sun*, 12 August 1954, p.1; I. Poole *et al*, *The New Zealand Family From 1840: a Demographic History* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2007), p.207; 'Today in History', <<http://www.nzhistory.net.timeline/22/6>>, accessed 28 August 2009

⁸³ *Star-Sun*, 11 August 1954, p.1; *Auckland Star*, 10 August 1954, p.1; 11 August 1954, p.1; *Auckland Star*, 10 August 1954, p.1; 11 August 1954, p.11; *Star-Sun*, 14 August 1954, p.1; *Star-Sun*, 7 August 1954, p.1; *Star--Sun*, 12 August 1954, p.1; Ian Pool *et al*, *The New Zealand Family From 1840: a Demographic History* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2007), p.207; 'Today in History', <<http://www.nzhistory.net.timeline/22/6>>

⁸⁴ 'Indecent Publications Amendment Act.1954', *New Zealand Libraries*, Vol.17, No.10 (Nov-Dec. 1954), p.230

cigarettes on Friday and Saturday nights in their own homes.⁸⁵ Most juries returned ‘Not Guilty’ verdicts on the charges of unlawful carnal knowledge; in one case, the jury sat for only fifteen minutes before announcing its decision. The widely-reported trials produced no evidence that the accused and their friends had even read ‘comics’ or any other form of ‘pernicious literature’, let alone been influenced by them into dubious behaviour.⁸⁶ By August, the *Observer*’s cartoonist wryly represented the ‘youth problem’ with gentle irony as no more than part of the continuum of inter-generational misunderstandings habitual through the ages.⁸⁷

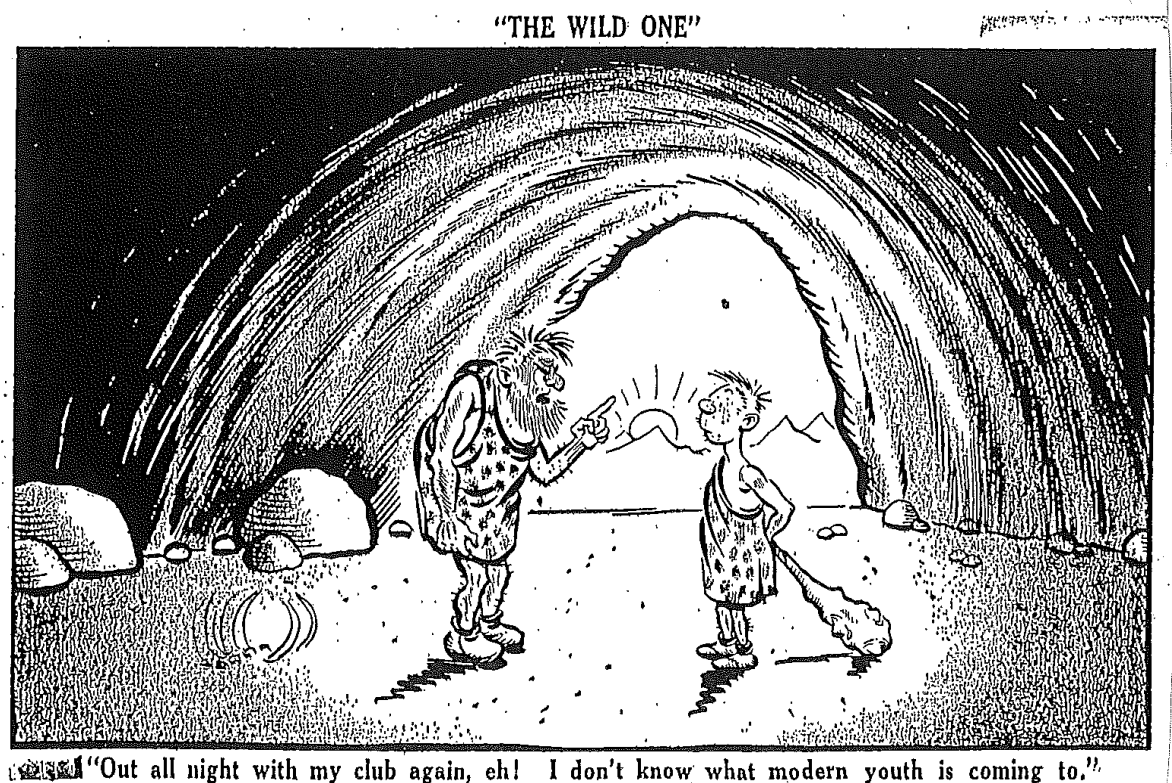


Figure 9 ‘Delinquency’ as Age-Old Inter-Generational Trope

A month later both the *Star* and *Star-Sun* acknowledged that juvenile delinquency was ‘a social aberration and not a characteristic of New Zealand youth. Nor were drastic measures required to deal with either comics or their youthful readers they had been accused of corrupting. ‘What convincing body of evidence,’ asked the *Star*, ‘is there that even one act

⁸⁵ *Star-Sun*, 2 August 1954, p.3; 4 August 1954, p.11; 5 August 1954, p.14 The Children’s Court heard the cases of 59 ‘children’ charged with ‘immoral conduct’. Because Children’s Court cases were closed to public and media, it is not known how many charges were established, how many dismissed and what action was taken by the magistrates. *Auckland Star*, 3 September 1954, p.2

⁸⁶ F.N. Stace, interviewed on *Spectrum*, 14 August, 1991, *Radio New Zealand*, cited Yska, *All Shook Up*, p.83

⁸⁷ *New Zealand Observer*, 18 August 1954 H-633-042, N.Z. Cartoon Archives, Wellington (Cartoon Archives)

or moral delinquency was directly and almost wholly due to the reading of 'objectionable' matter?'⁸⁸

Initially, concerns about 'objectionable' American comics had presented Holland with the problem that public attention might be diverted from the issue the government intended to take to voters in 1954: its stewardship of what it claimed was 'unprecedented prosperity' in the forms of high wages, plenty of work, and a cornucopia of consumer items such as cars and washing machines, fridges and electric stoves.⁸⁹ This approach was an evolution of National's tactics of the late 1940s - to promote itself as the party of consumer populism, or in Chris Brickell's words, as 'the party of the new consumer age'. Consumption and its consequences had become 'an important area in which political philosophies were expressed and contested'.⁹⁰ Throughout the 1954 parliamentary session, National M.P.s insisted that consumer happiness would be endangered by the electoral victory of a Labour party obsessed with regulating, controlling and licensing. Labour M.P.s claimed that the 'flood' of comics from abroad and its alleged dire social consequences were symptomatic of the effects of the government's economic deregulation policies. National M.P.s replied that Labour's demands for controls and restrictions on consumer goods, especially on imports, whether they be comics, sardines or toilet bowls, were proof that Labour's leaders were indeed 'hidebound conservatives of the older generation. ...bogged down in the slough of despond....' Dean Eyre, for example, portrayed the opposition as 'a forlorn lot.... [who] bemoaned the fact that people were able to buy refrigerators, washing machines, vacuum cleaners and electric shavers'.⁹¹ His colleague, James Maher, claimed 'We do not want to be killjoys; we want to see everybody spending.'⁹² For National, then, the extension of prosperity and purchasing power was an extension of New Zealand's egalitarian tradition, hopefully enabling ordinary New Zealanders to participate in a new democratic consumerism, in which everyone could purchase commodities other than the basic requirements of food, shelter and clothing.

⁸⁸ *Auckland Star*, 29 September 1954, p.2 The two newspapers switched their target from the government to the opposition, condemning Labour's criticisms of press reportage of 'juvenile immorality,' especially Nash's advocacy of press censorship. A scathing *Star* editorial condemned Labour's 'snufflebusting nonsense' and claimed that '... in the opinion of the Leader of the Opposition and some of his followers juvenile delinquency, though deplorable, would be much less deplorable if the newspapers hadn't mentioned it.' *Auckland Star*, 1 October 1954, p.2

⁸⁹ *Freedom*, 23 June 1954, p.2

⁹⁰ Chris Brickell, 'The Politics of Post-War Consumer Culture', *New Zealand Journal of History*, Vol.40, No.2 (October 2006), p.138; p.136

⁹¹ NZPD, Vol. 303, (1954), p.202

⁹² NZPD, Vol. 303, (1954), p.456

National's intention that this message should become the dominant issue in the election campaign was made clear at the party's annual conference in early July, at the very time when the Hutt Valley incidents were about to become public knowledge. Guy describes this crucial event as a 'rally' and suggests that Holland's declaration that '[t]his is really the start of our election campaign, make no mistake about that' shows that the Prime Minister intended to use the issue of juvenile delinquency and its causes as a crucial electoral trope for National.⁹³ This is misleading. In pre-television 1950s election year party conferences were important occasions, not one-off events. Parties explicated their major themes and policies for the forthcoming elections. National was indeed using the conference to ignite its campaign. But instead of focusing on pernicious American comics, juvenile crime and youthful immorality, the conference shunted such issues to one side. The cynosure of the conference was what the National party president's keynote speech described as the 'wonderful prosperity' and 'higher standard of living' achieved under the Government. He also lauded its policies of removing 'socialist shackles' and 'incentive by material reward'. Holland's speech declared his government had achieved higher living standards and removed irksome restrictions, promising more of the same if National were re-elected. Neither man referred to juvenile delinquency, declining morals or comics' alleged role fostering these perceived problems. Nor did such issues appear in the long list of Conference recommendations and remits, or in delegates' speeches, all of which were dominated by the issue of prosperity, not delinquency.⁹⁴ The latter issue, as we have seen, also exposed the government to charges that its economic policies were creating social problems. National's intention was to downplay that issue and focus public attention on the consumer paradise that the government claimed it was constructing for New Zealanders. Soler refers to "the government's highly visible role in legitimising the [public] 'concern' and 'panic'" over the delinquency issue.⁹⁵ But had the government wished to curry favour with these allegedly panicked voters, or with the cultural and moral lobbyists' demands, the conference presented the ideal opportunity to gain maximum publicity by invoking the mantras of censorship and proscription of comics. Instead, the conference ignored the issue. This hardly supports Soler's contention. Nor does it support Guy's implication that Holland came to the conference intending to exploit the Hutt Valley affair for electoral gain.

⁹³ Guy, "Moral Panic", p. 441

⁹⁴ *Evening Post*, 5 July 1954, p.7; 6 July, p. 15; *Freedom*, 7 July 1954, p.1; *Freedom*, 2 July 1954, p.2

⁹⁵ Soler, "Drifting Towards Moral Chaos", p.107

Guy also argues that ‘Mazengarb seems to have hastened the inquiry process in order to produce an early report – within the parliamentary session. Mazengarb’s background and actions suggest that in some measure the inquiry was conducted to serve the purposes of the government’.⁹⁶ The publication of Mazengarb committee’s report in September had potential to divert attention away from the government’s focus on consumerism, and direct it instead to issues of the cultural and social implications of such a policy, including that of imported and pernicious literature in the form of comics and pulps. The report met with general approval from newspapers, religious and civic groups and, grudgingly, the opposition, whose leaders endorsed the report and its bulk mailing.⁹⁷ Holland swiftly appointed a cabinet subcommittee of four, in which, significantly, the more liberal Bowden, Algie and Marshall outnumbered Ross, to study its twenty recommendations and to report to him on possible legislation.⁹⁸ He then declared the Government’s intention to introduce legislation implementing some recommendations and three bills were rapidly drafted and enacted unanimously by parliament. This legislation, implementing a few of the report’s recommendations, does not justify Openshaw and Shuker’s characterisation as a ‘comprehensive package’.⁹⁹ It was more accurately described by the *Wanganui Chronicle* as ‘spineless, consistent with the customary technique of once again seeming to do something and yet committing the Government to no decision at all’.¹⁰⁰

The key statute, the Indecent Publications Amendment Act, was essentially a copy of recent Australian state legislation. Several submissions to the inquiry had recommended features of such legislation on offensive literature as templates for New Zealand to follow. Significantly, the two key components of Australian legislation against offensive literature - a legislative extension of the existing definition of ‘indecenty’ and the administrative principle of registering distributors of periodicals and punishing those who flouted the new

⁹⁶ Guy, “Moral Panic”, p.441

⁹⁷ Later in September, 1954, Holland adopted a reporter’s suggestion that the government ‘consider getting the report in its entirety into the hands of every parent in New Zealand’. Nash commented ‘I am more than pleased that the report is to be sent to every home. I hope parents will read and study it and get some advantage out of it’. Posting of the report was scheduled to begin in the last week in October, three weeks before Election Day. ‘Today in History: 20 September, 1954’, <<http://www.nzhistory.net/timeline/20/9>>, accessed 7 November 2008; *Star-Sun*, 23 Sept, p.1; Yskva, *All Shook Up*, p.112; Guy, “Moral Panic”, p.442; *Press*, 24 Sept. 1954, p.14; NZPD, Vol.306, (1955,) p. 1348; *Star-Sun*, 27 Sept. 1954, p.3; *Auckland Star*, 27 Sept. 1954, p.1; 29 Sept. 1954, p.1

⁹⁸ Report on the Special Committee on Moral Delinquency in Children and Adolescents,” Appendix H-47, *Annual Journal of the New Zealand House of Representatives*, 1954, pp.66-68; *Star-Sun*, 22 Sept., 1954, p.3

⁹⁹ Openshaw & Shuker, *Worthless and Indecent*, p.8. The legislation consisted of the Indecent Publications Amendment Act, the Police Offences Amendment Act and the Child Welfare Amendment Act (No.2).

¹⁰⁰ *Wanganui Chronicle*, 30 September 1954, cited Dalley, *Family Matters*, p.188

definition - were encapsulated within the Report's major recommendation and its subsequent enactment as the Indecent Publications Amendment Act.

This was legislation by prefabrication, for the act was constructed from segments taken directly from apposite Australian statutes. The act's crucial definition of 'objectionable' literature 'echoed almost word for word' part of Queensland's legislation, and also imitated sections of the Victorian and South Australian acts. And its classification of indecent subjects – 'unduly emphasising matters of sex, horror, crimes of violence, gross horror or cruelty' – mimicked the wording of the Victorian and Queensland legislation. There was one crucial difference. New Zealand's act did not incorporate Queensland's sweeping definition of 'objectionable' literature, which included such dangerously vague terms as 'likely to encourage public disorder' and 'calculated to injure the citizens....'¹⁰¹ It extended the definition of 'indecent' and 'obscene' to bring 'comics' and similar publications within the scope of the 1910 Indecent Publications Act.¹⁰² However, it did not require registration of all comics, nor did it make dealing in unregistered comics an offence, both key demands of several key groups, such as the ICCPA, which submitted evidence to the inquiry. Two other acts made it an offence to sell contraceptives to adolescents under age sixteen and to enable Children's Courts to classify as 'delinquent' children under sixteen who engaged in sexual behaviour.

VI

The Labour opposition urged that the government's planned legislation be more comprehensive and vigorous. Nordmeyer and May were unhappy that most of the report's

¹⁰¹ MS papers 2384, Folder 06, Auckland Catholic Youth Centre, Memo to Committee, p.5; Folder 01, K1, ATL; A. C. Burns, *"Some Aspects of Censorship: a Survey of Censorship Law and Practice in New Zealand from 1841 to 1963, Mainly Concerning the Control of Indecent Publications"*, M.A. thesis, Victoria University of Wellington, 1968, pp.103-5; I.D. Campbell. 'The Indecent Publications Amendment Act, 1954: a Commentary', *The New Zealand Law Journal*, September 28, 1954, p.293; 'Comment: The Uncomical Comics Legislation', *Meanjin*, Vol. xiii, No. 2 (1954) p.318

¹⁰² The act required registration of distributors of periodicals etc and set up a process for deregistering any distributor found guilty of an offence under either the Indecent Publications Act 1910 or Section 157 of the Crimes Act, 1908. It also made it an offence for a person who was not registered to sell or distribute for sale any printed matter. The new legislation also made two alterations to Section 5 of the 1910 Act. This section had made the "literary, scientific, or artistic merit or importance of the document or matter" of relevance for the magistrate when making a decision. The amending legislation of 1954 extended this provision: the courts now had to consider the "literary or artistic merit or medical, legal, political, or scientific character or importance of the document or matter." The Child Welfare Amendment Act (No.2) enabled Children's Courts to classify as 'delinquent those 'children' under 16 who engaged in sexual behaviour. The Police Offences Amendment Act made it illegal to sell contraceptives to those under 16. Dalley, *Family Matters*, p.187; Burns, 'Some Aspects of Censorship', pp.103-5; Campbell, 'Indecent Publications Amendment Act', p.293

recommendations had been omitted from the proposed legislation.¹⁰³ For Labour, the report and the subsequent legislation was merely the ‘starting-point for further improvement of the situation of juvenile delinquency’.¹⁰⁴ Hugh Watt, for example, complained in 1955 that the ‘censor’ lacked authority ‘to say which books should be sold, and which books should not be sold’. He insisted that a number of the report’s recommendations should have been implemented immediately.¹⁰⁵ But Holland would not accept this. His government’s stance was that this legislation was a terminus, not a ‘starting-point’. He had always been unwilling to legislate on the comics issue and he was not going to extend further legislative opportunities for posturing on moral-cultural issues.¹⁰⁶ As a sop to the moral conservatives in both parties, he agreed to the establishment of a Special Select Committee to further consider the committee’s recommendations.

The few legislative items that resulted from the Mazengarb Report in 1954 were passed in conditions of unseemly haste, although that speed was facilitated by the key act being based upon an Australian template. However, their accelerated and unanimous enactment was possible only with the support of the Labour opposition. Had Labour insisted, it could have used parliamentary procedures to delay the passage of the legislation and subject it to more rigid scrutiny and more rigorous debate. Instead, it agreed to hasten parliamentary procedures by incorporating the discussion, the second readings, and the committee stage of all three bills together.¹⁰⁷ Thus the report appeared on a Tuesday, the bills were introduced on Friday, and passed their final reading the following Wednesday.¹⁰⁸ This haste, and the contents of the Indecent Publications Amendment Act, were condemned by legal experts, educators and professional librarians, booksellers and newspaper editors, including some who some weeks earlier had demanded immediate action on the comic ‘menace’. The Christchurch *Press* complained that the three bills were ‘virtually written

¹⁰³ ICCPA Minutes, meeting, 25 March 1955; 1954 Annual Report in Minutes, 25 March 1955 meeting, MS y 1838, ATL

¹⁰⁴ NZPD, Vol.304, (1954), p.2016 Nordmeyer complained that although the inquiry’s work had exposed a ‘cancerous growth’, the legislation, instead of providing the requisite surgery, merely attempted to ‘patch up some of the things to which the committee had drawn attention, but they will not attempt to solve the problem’. He and Nash complained the Child Welfare bill did not go far enough in dealing with their particular obsession, the availability of condoms for teenagers, and drafted an amendment increasing the age at which contraceptives could be sold from sixteen to eighteen. Nash also demanded stricter controls on their sale. NZPD, Vol. 304, (1954), p.2016; p.2013; *Star-Sun*, 30 September 1954, p.4

¹⁰⁵ NZPD, Vol.306, (1954) 2 August 1955, p.1348

¹⁰⁶ *Star-Sun*, 29 September 1954, p.4; *Auckland Star*, 30 September 1954, p.4

¹⁰⁷ NZPD, Vol. 304, (1954), p.2005

¹⁰⁸ *New Zealand Libraries*, Vol.17, No.10, (Nov-Dec.1954), p.230

overnight'.¹⁰⁹ The *New Zealand Law Journal* denounced the Amendment Act as clumsily and hastily drafted, describing its content as 'a monumental instance of misdirected bureaucratic control'. The *Auckland Star* warned that New Zealand 'in hastily accepting this legislation without adequate criticism, is casting itself upon a sea perilous with rocks and shoals....'¹¹⁰

For all its faults, New Zealand's legislative response to concerns about comics appears relatively restrained when compared to comparable legislation enacted overseas. It never established a supervisory body on the lines of France's Commission for the Oversight and Control of Publications for Children and Adolescents.¹¹¹ It did not follow Canada's federal parliament in legislating a maximum penalty of two years imprisonment for the printing, distribution, production or sale of crime comics or magazines.¹¹² Nor did it emulate Queensland's Objectionable Literature Act, which established a Literature Board to ban publications it deemed offensive and which refused to provide any criteria for offensiveness, basing its judgement on members' standards of taste.¹¹³ By contrast, New Zealand's approach was relatively circumspect.

VII

When the election campaign began in October, the issue at the heart of the Mazengarb inquiry, pernicious literature and juvenile immorality, far from being 'a particular national preoccupation' which played a key role in the election campaign, had disappeared from the political stage.¹¹⁴ Holland succeeded in defusing an issue that had the potential to be exploited by Labour for electoral advantage. The Mazengarb inquiry had, as

¹⁰⁹ *Press*, 28 September 1954, p.12

¹¹⁰ Campbell, 'Indecent Publications Amendment Act', pp.293-4; *Auckland Star*, 29 September 1954, p.2

¹¹¹ Richard Jobs, "Tarzan Under Attack: Youth, Comics, and Cultural Reconstruction in Postwar France", in *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 26, No.4 (Fall 2003), p.688

¹¹² The bill amended that section of the Canadian Criminal Code which dealt with obscene literature. Section 207 of the Code would now be contravened by anyone who 'prints, publishes, sells or distributes any magazine, periodical or book which exclusively or substantially comprises matter depicting pictorially the commission of crimes, real or fictitious, thereby tending or likely to induce or influence youthful persons to violate the law or to corrupt the morals of such persons'. Bill 10, 1949, cited in Adams, 'Youth, Corruptibility', p.99; Swainger, 'American Crime Comics', p.228

¹¹³ The Board had the significant legal effect of departing from the established juridical approach in that it relieved them of their traditional legal duty of acting as *custos morum* in obscenity cases. It was intended to be a state agency independent of the court system, like its equivalent in Eire on which it was modeled. Finnane, 'Censorship and Comics', p.228; Peter Coleman, 'The Comics Business', *The Observer*, 10 December 1960, <<http://comicsdownunder.blogspot.com/2007/11/australian-comics-1960-snapshot.html>>, accessed 20 March 2010; Coleman described how a test case brought by the Horwitz Company resulted in the Australian High Court ruling that the firm's comics were not endangering morals.

¹¹⁴ Soler, "Drifting Towards Moral Chaos", p.2

Somerville noted, 'made a ripple on the surface of the times...but no more'.¹¹⁵ In November the *New Zealand Listener* joined newspapers in commenting on the 'quiet election campaign ...[with] no controversial question'.¹¹⁶

During that campaign both main parties focused on economic matters, not on concerns about the 'flood' of comics into New Zealand, or juvenile immorality. *Canta's* coverage of the election, for example, emphasised inflation, curtailment of civil liberties and the government's past performance. Comics and delinquency were not mentioned.¹¹⁷ Labour, as Keith Sinclair observes, 'tried to make it a 'cost-of-living' election.'¹¹⁸ Nash's election broadcast to the nation made high inflation 'the issue'; he never mentioned juvenile immorality or indecent comics.¹¹⁹ Labour's advertising campaign also ignored mention of parental responsibilities, delinquency, or 'obscene' literature. It emphasised policies aimed at helping families overcome inflation: reduced income tax, stabilised food prices, cheaper electricity.¹²⁰ Holland's radio election broadcast employed the imagery of commerce. 'I have the honour of being your Chairman of Directors,' he told voters, claiming that under his government 'great prosperity had come to the people,' making New Zealanders 'shareholders in the most prosperous and happy country in the world.' He admitted 'we have not made the pound go further ... [but] we have provided you with more pounds to go the full distance'. Holland made no mention of juvenile delinquency; instead, he reassured his radio audience that the nation's future was 'safely in the hands of the young people.'¹²¹ National's manifesto also contained no references to comics or profligate youth, preferring to blandly affirm National's aims of achieving 'higher moral standards, [and] appreciation of the ... value of home life and family influence.'¹²²

Holland's government fought the election on its chosen ground, the consumer economy. The deeper social and moral implications of that economy, implicit in the events surrounding the Mazengarb inquiry, were pushed aside. A survey of the *Auckland Star's* series of profiles and statements contributed by candidates within Auckland province is revealing. Economic matters, especially consumer prosperity and inflation, dominated, followed by concerns over power cuts and local issues such as roads and drainage. The

¹¹⁵ Somerville, *Jack in the Pulpit*, p.135

¹¹⁶ *New Zealand Listener*, 12 November 1954, p.4

¹¹⁷ *Canta*, 12 August, 16 September 1954, p.8

¹¹⁸ Keith Sinclair, *Walter Nash* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1976), p.294

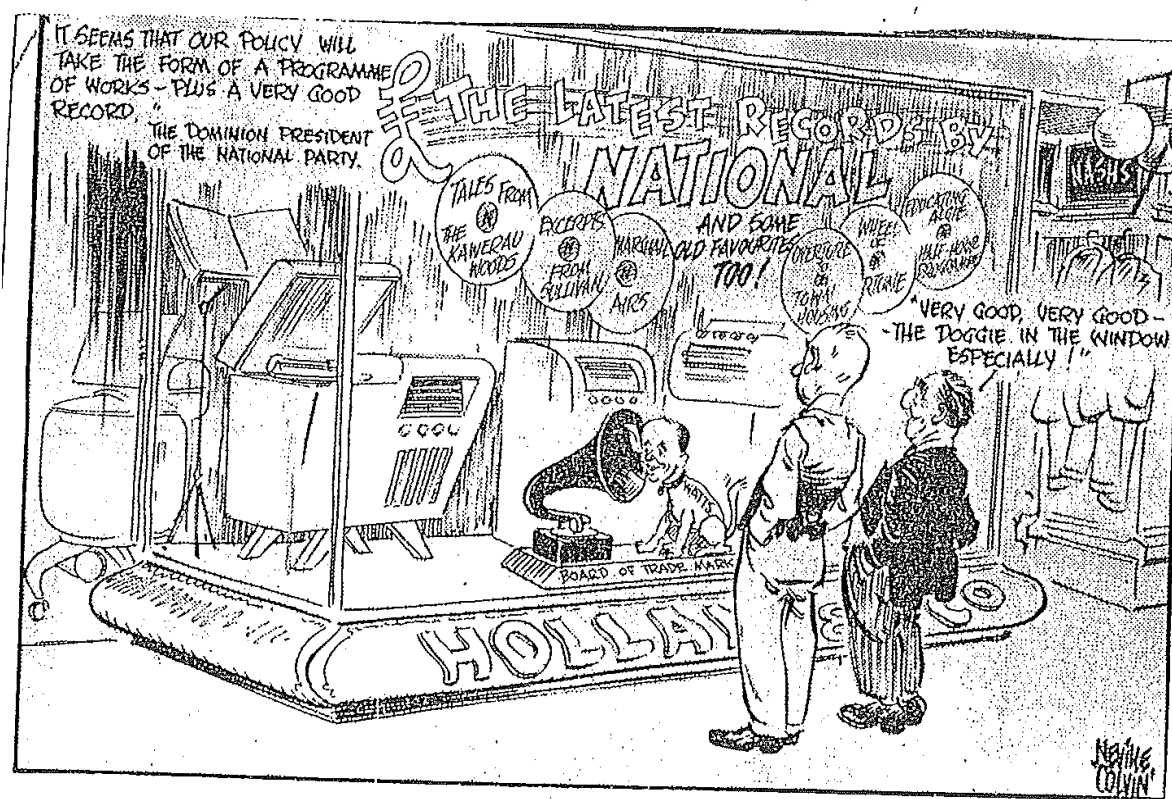
¹¹⁹ *Star-Sun*, 20 October 1954, p.10

¹²⁰ e.g. Labour Party advertisement in *New Zealand Listener*, 5 November 1954, p.2

¹²¹ *Star-Sun*, 19 October 1954, p.3

¹²² *Freedom*, 20 October 1954, p.9

issues of the Mazengarb inquiry - youthful crime, parental control, 'pernicious literature' and censorship - did not feature. Nor did they appear in both Christchurch newspapers' pre-election coverage of local candidates and electorates. A search of the Turnbull Library's Cartoon Archives shows that during the election campaign, newspaper political cartoons, cartoonists focused, not on comics or delinquents, but on economic and consumer matters, which they used as markers to differentiate between National and Labour. Indeed, months



Window Dressing

Figure 10 Window Dressing¹²³

before the campaign proper began, the *Evening Post* published a cartoon which illustrated the particular spin that National intended to impart to its upcoming politicking. It explicates Holland and National's unremitting focus on consumerism, exemplified by washing machines, radios, radiograms, and records. Whereas National's window is large and cheerful, Labour's by contrast is small and gloomy, contains only a few drab items of clothing and incorporates a pawn-broker's emblem. The cartoon's title, however, implies that National's promised consumer heaven may be mere advertising gimmick rather than performance.

¹²³ *Evening Post*, 3 June 1954 E-549-q-7-033 NZ Cartoon Archives

VIII

The 1954 comics controversy provides insights into New Zealand's postwar cultural politics. In its wider context, the affair was an antipodean irruption of what Robert Bezucha called the 'moralization of society', a feature of late nineteenth century western European and American cultural and social history.¹²⁴ It represents the consequences of a bourgeois and elitist response to the overwhelming transmission and growth of new forms of media. For New Zealand civic and cultural elites, as for those in western Europe, Canada, Britain and Australia, *American* cultural modes best exemplified this disturbing trend. Characteristic of these various national elites' reactions was their determination not only to regulate the dissemination of new media such as comics to their national publics, but also to supervise and uplift aesthetic tastes and moral standards. Canada's Peace River affair illuminates its Hutt Valley counterpart. The reactions of the two countries' cultural elites provided evidence of the shared transnational nature of postwar responses to American culture rather than proof of New Zealand exceptionalism. A persistent representation of the Mazengarb inquiry and its context has been that of a quaint exhibition of national shallowness, displaying the lazy and provincial mentality allegedly typical of most New Zealanders in the 1950s. Yet, as Peace River shows, concerns about American comics and their dire effects upon youthful behaviour were a staple global postwar anxiety, apprehensions exacerbated by many within the cultural and civic elites.

In the New Zealand context, the events of 1954 demonstrate that the steady, decade-long seepage of unsubstantiated but volatile claims about the inundation of American comics and their pernicious effects had culminated in a venting, not an explosion. By 1956, the issue of comics and their impact on the young had dissipated as a matter of serious public or parliamentary contention.¹²⁵ Contrary to conventional wisdom, the events of 1954 constituted neither a moral panic nor a cunning election-year ploy by Holland's government, intended to exploit a credulous public's hysteria about popular media and juvenile

¹²⁴ Robert J. Bezucha, cited in Michael Kammen, *American Culture American Tastes: Social Change and the Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf/ Basic Books, 1999), pp.249-250

¹²⁵ There was a limited debate in Parliament in 1955 on some aspects of juvenile delinquency. By the 1956 session, as Shuker points out, 'juvenile delinquency' was no longer listed as a topic in the relevant index. Nor were 'comics' or 'pulp'. Media interest had collapsed from early October 1954. Openshaw, Shuker *et al*, *Youth, Meida....*, pp.19-30, p.211. Dalley claims, *Family Matters*, fn 29, pp.384-5, that there remained a longer-term 'media interest'. However, *if* this indeed existed –and I endorse the Shuker conclusion here – it was disconnected from the key issue of comics and their allegedly pernicious effects.

immorality. If any ‘panic’ was involved in 1954, then it came from members of religious, educational and intellectual elites, and some political groups. Their aim was to alarm the New Zealand public into believing that an inundation of American popular culture, especially comics, was endangering the nation by corrupting youthful morals and causing juvenile immorality. These anti-comics moral entrepreneurs hoped that concocting a mix of moral indignation and cultural xenophobia in an election-year context would facilitate achievement of their political, social and cultural agendas.

For a few months the issue of American comics was a concourse where cultural, social and political negotiation and conflict became manifest for public scrutiny. This foray was a foreshadowing of what would become a crucial theme of 1960s New Zealand: concerns over youth culture and the cinema, music and literature that both invoked and gave expression to it. Although the comics outcry of 1954 was short-lived, the motivations behind it were long-term. The event not only revealed that midcentury New Zealand contained significant elements of cultural and political contention. It also showed that the public, rather than panicking in the face of hyperbolic, scaremongering and self-seeking claims made by some of the nation’s elites, ultimately made reasoned assessments that ‘comics’, American or otherwise, endangered neither the nation nor its youth.

CHAPTER SIX

‘WORKS OF THE DEVIL’: HOLLYWOOD MOVIES AND THE EMBEDDING OF FUNDAMENTAL TROPES

I walked part-way home with Franky
Who lived out on the coast road beyond the cemetery,
Asked him “Are you going to the pictures tomorrow?”
He shook his old man’s head solemnly,
He spoke in his old man’s deep voice:
“My father says moving pictures are Works of the Devil”
looking thoughtful. Truly, that was a thing to ponder,
aged seven, coming up for eight.

Kendrick Smithyman, ‘Educational’¹

I

In March 1929 Wellingtonians queued by their hundreds to see the first New Zealand screening of an ‘all-talking’ feature film.² Some months later the *New Zealand Free Lance* featured an editorial cartoon condemning ‘talkies’ and the gramophone for their deleterious impact on New Zealand audiences.³ Significantly, these two media technologies were crucial transmitters of American popular culture into New Zealand in the first six decades of the twentieth century. The cartoon articulated tropes about American culture in general and American movies in particular that were already becoming embedded within the cultural values of influential members of New Zealand’s civic and intellectual elites. These attitudes would stubbornly persist for decades. An understanding of the nature and origins of these cultural memes is crucial for an understanding of their assimilation into mid-century New Zealand discourses about Hollywood movies.

The *Free Lance* cartoonist identified ‘talkies’ and recorded music with Uncle Sam, the universally accepted symbol of the United States. The Americanness of one technology, the gramophone, is emphasised both by the cartoonist’s labelling it as the ‘Yankaphone’ and by

¹ Kendrick Smithyman, *Are You Going to the Pictures?* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1987)

² The programme included ‘supporting subjects’ with sound, including an item in which G.B. Shaw impersonated Mussolini. The feature film was an ‘all-talking’ comedy *The Star Witness*, with the American comedian Chic Sale, whose most famous persona was that of an outhouse builder. The next month the first talkie features were shown in Auckland: *The Bellamy Trial*, *Broadway Melody* and *The Singing Fool*. David Lascelles, *Eighty Turbulent Years: the Paramount Theatre Wellington 1917-1997* (Wellington: Millward Press, 1997), p.21; P.A. Harrison, ‘The Motion Picture Industry in New Zealand 1890-1930: a History of the Commercial Distribution and Exhibition of Film’ (M.A. Thesis, University of Auckland, 1974), pp.188-9; Dianne Haworth, *Father and Son: the Bob Kerridge Story* (Auckland: Harper Collins, 2004), pp.23-5.

³ *New Zealand Free Lance*, 18 December 1929, p.6

the music it plays: 'The Star-Spangled Banner'. We can easily identify the other technology, movies, as American because several reels of film are tagged with descriptors such as 'American War Film'. The industrial nature of that nation's movies and music is emphasised by their representation as commodities packaged for overseas cultural



Figure 11 The 'Yankaphone'

consumption. The 'Yankaphone' is playing 'Canned music'; the records are sitting in a packing case ticketed 'Made in the USA Store in Cool Space'.⁴ The cartoon shows the

⁴ In Australia ten years later Evelyn Tildesley complained about what she called American 'tinned culture – cinema, gramophone, wireless'. Jill Julius Matthews, 'Beatrice Maude Tildesley Goes to the Pictures'. Evelyn was the sister of Beatrice Tildesley, the socially prominent cultural critic. Jill Julius Matthews, 'Beatrice Maude Tildesley Goes to the Pictures', <www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/firstrealeasae/fr_16/jjmfr16.html>

cinema screen on which the images are projected; although the movie projectors are not depicted, the on-screen images are obviously the result of a mechanical-electrical technique. The kinetic sense of motion and fluidity produced by this industrial process is conveyed by the cartoonist's use of angular movements frozen on the screen: arms and legs akimbo, gestures and actions emphasised by staccato lines and graceful arcs. These cultural artifacts are not only specifically identified as American. They are also depicted as modern products of an industrial process, packaged or 'canned' for overseas consumption.

This 1929 discourse on American cinema is also important for its depiction of that nation's films. Not only are they represented as meretricious and violent; they are aimed at susceptible youth. All these tropes were staple features of negative mid-twentieth century New Zealand reactions to Hollywood movies. The subjects of Uncle Sam's reels of film include 'Sex Appeal Pictures', 'Gun Play Film' and 'Sensational'. The film shown on-screen depicts a scantily clad dancing showgirl, a policeman, and a man clutching a barrel of 'Shinemoon'. All three are firing revolvers randomly. The image is one of farce and mayhem, referencing a scene from a Mack Sennett or Keystone Cops comedy. Viewing these on-screen antics while listening to 'The Star-Spangled Banner' is a young New Zealand boy. A tall Uncle Sam physically dominates the cartoon as he plays the record on the 'Yankaphone'. The boy, arms raised enthusiastically in response to the American audio and visual stimuli, asks '... are all my American cousins like these?' The cartoonist leaves no doubt that young New Zealand is only too eager to sample the canned culture supplied by America, a cultural aesthetic that the cartoon portrays as sensational, violent and carnal.

According to this representation, the American cinema and its accomplice in cultural crime, American music, were agents of degeneracy, indoctrinating New Zealanders into accepting salacious American cultural and social mores. Years before 1945, American cinema was frequently accused of cultural imperialism. Most New Zealand critics of Hollywood movies regarded them as undermining, even replacing, traditional British cultural influences. In the cartoon New Zealand's cultural patron is Uncle Sam, not John Bull. American film and music were intruding into New Zealand's cultural space. This response anticipated the reactions of those in western Europe during the post-1945 decade who regarded jazz, rock 'n' roll, comics and Hollywood movies as cultural provocations and threats to national identities.⁵

⁵ See Sabine Hake, 'Anti-Americanism and the Cold war: On the DFA Films', in Alexander Stephan, ed, *Americanization and Anti-Americanism: the German Encounter With American Culture After 1945* (New York: Bergham Books, 2007), pp.148-9

In New Zealand, as in other western societies, movies, the predominant entertainment technology of the first half of the twentieth century, became the pre-eminent cultural domain in which the nation confronted modernity.⁶ The cartoonist's reaction to the arrival of the 'talkies' reveals that the essential tropes characteristic of unfavourable New Zealand receptions of American movies during the next quarter-century were already infixed by 1930. Later responses to Hollywood were variations on a set of themes already in place and emblematic of wider, contentious cultural and political issues. It is impossible to appreciate the significance of reactions to Hollywood in New Zealand in the mid-century without recognising their foundational underpinning, established during the three decades before World War Two.

II

In 1923 a New York newspaper proclaimed that 'The film is to America what the flag was once to Britain'.⁷ Seven decades later the cultural historian Lary May concluded 'Nothing is more American than Hollywood. All agree on this'.⁸ Throughout the twentieth century, Hollywood symbolised America, becoming in David Cook's words, 'the chief purveyor of American culture to the world'. Vanessa Schwarz argues that 'no cultural form has been so often and for so long identified with American influence as movies made in Hollywood'.⁹ Following Pascale Casanova's identification of Paris at the cusp of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the physical and symbolic centre of an international literary space, the capital of a 'world republic of letters', Schwarz located Hollywood as the world's 'center of production for film, the twentieth century's quintessential art form'.¹⁰ As Allen Scott observed, 'In one sense, Hollywood is a very specific place in Southern California.... In another sense, Hollywood is everywhere, and in its realization as a

⁶ See, for example, Carey Ross, "Mass culture and divided audiences: cinema and social change in inter-war Germany", *Past and Present*, No.197 (November 2006), pp.157-196

⁷ *New York Morning Post*, cited in Richard Maltby, *Hollywood Cinema* 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), p.126

⁸ Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p.1

⁹ David A. Cook, *A History of Narrative Film* 3rd ed. (New York: Norton, 1996), p.43; Vanessa Schwartz, *It's So French! Hollywood, Paris and the Making of Cosmopolitan Film Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p.5

¹⁰ Schwarz, p.10

disembodied assortment of images and narratives, its presence is felt broadly across the entire globe'.¹¹

From the arrival of motion pictures in New Zealand in the early twentieth century until the 1960s, terms like 'cinema' or 'movies' almost inevitably referenced American films rather than their British or continental counterparts. In 1920, Dr. Truby King condemned movies as 'the most evil thing we have in our midst for the corruption of girls and boys'. That condemnation was based on an unnamed film he had seen three years earlier, a film he carefully identified as American by referring on several occasions to its locations in New York city, especially the Bowery, a location then notorious for its gangs and drunken violence.¹² As Gordon Mirams, the New Zealand film critic and future film censor noted in 1945,

"Hollywood" has come to mean the whole cinema industry, not just that part of it situated in California. Who, except a few experts and enthusiasts, bothers to mention Elstree? It is 'Hollywood has done this' and 'Hollywood has done that', not 'Hollywood and Elstree have done it'.¹³

For New Zealanders, Hollywood was symbolic of America, a globally recognised metonym for the culture and society of the United States and the essential transmitter of representations of American culture and society to New Zealanders.

Films were a feature of New Zealand social and cultural life from the earliest days of commercial cinema. Only ten months after the world's first public cinema screening in December 1895, a motion picture was shown in Auckland, using an Edison projector imported from the United States. A decade later Aucklanders could see, a few months after its American release, the first 10,000 foot long movie, entitled *America at Work*. The next year the Queens cinema in Auckland adopted the American city custom of having continuous screenings, from 11:00 a.m to 11 p.m. By the end of 1916 that city had thirteen inner-city picture theatres. By the end of the 1920s, one sixth of the population of Auckland went to the movies each Saturday night. As Nerida Elliott notes, cinema's appeal in the city soon encompassed all social levels, and was not confined to the working class.¹⁴

¹¹ Allen Scott, *On Hollywood: the Place, the Industry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p.138

¹² Truby King, 'Picture Shows: Their Evil Effects on Children, and the Need for reform, Regulation, and Control. Discussion at the General Conference of the Royal New Zealand Society for the Health of Women and Children, held in Wellington, 1920. (Dunedin: Crown Publishing, 1920), pp. 9-11.

¹³ Gordon Mirams, *Speaking Candidly: Films and People in New Zealand* (Hamilton: Paul's Book Arcade, 1945), p.125

¹⁴ Bruce Hayward and Selwyn Hayward, *Cinemas of Auckland 1896-1979* (Auckland: Lodestar Press, 1979), pp.2-3; p.6; p.10; p.12; Nerida Elliott, "'Anzac, Hollywood and Home": Cinema and Film-Going in Auckland, 1909-1939', (M.A. thesis, University of Auckland, 1989), p.123

In 1929, the year that the *Free Lance* published its ‘American Cousins’ cartoon, the United States Commerce Department published a bulletin *Motion Pictures in Australia and New Zealand*. Its author, Eugene Way, noted that for New Zealanders – ‘well-educated, healthy, sports-loving’ – cinema-going was a popular activity. He remarked that

the average motion-picture house in New Zealand is a comfortable, luxurious building ... comparable with theaters in cities of similar sizes in the United States. Orchestral selections, organ solos and other features precede the showing of the film, and every care is taken to cater to the desire of the public.

Way claimed that New Zealander cinema audiences enjoyed the ‘adaptation of well-known novels, society drama and light comedies’, but disliked ‘morbid and melancholy tragedy films’. He observed that 90 per cent of the films shown in New Zealand were of American origin, and noted that

programs are very similar to those seen in the United States. All the feature pictures are exhibited only a few weeks after their release on Broadway ... the picture fan frequently sees many American pictures before they have been made available to the smaller American communities.¹⁵

The arrival of ‘talkies’ to New Zealand cinemas in 1929-30 meant that New Zealanders emulated their American cousins in flocking to theatres in cities and small towns alike.¹⁶

By 1944, *NZ Magazine* observed disapprovingly, ‘[o]ur public is film-mad – Hollywood mad. Our public is so hungry for celluloid tales well presented – and Hollywood has the technique – that they will roll up afternoon and evening and cheerfully swallow the fare provided, without being too fussy about the details’.¹⁷ The next year Mirams declared that

We New Zealanders are a nation of film fans. Only tea drinking is a more popular diversion with us than picture-going. We adopted the motion picture earlier and more enthusiastically than most other countries, and today we spend as much time and money at the pictures, per head of population, as any other people in the world, except the Americans –and even they are not very far ahead of us. It follows that our picture-going habit exerts an enormous influence upon our manners, customs, and fashions, our speech, our standards of taste, and our attitudes of mind. If there is any such thing as a ‘New Zealand culture’, it is to a large extent the creation of Hollywood.¹⁸

¹⁵ Eugene Way, *Motion Pictures in Australia and New Zealand* (Dept of Commerce Trade Information Bulletin No.608 1, U.S. Govt Printing Office, 1929), p.39; 41; 43-4

¹⁶ At the opening of Auckland’s huge Civic Theatre opened in December 1929 a crowd of thousands pushed in the doors and staff were so busy that they threw handfuls of money into the box-office safe, unable to count it. When the De Luxe theatre in the small Horowhenua town of Levin installed ‘talkie’ equipment, bus services were re-organised in order to take residents from even small neighbouring towns such as Shannon into Levin for matinees and evening sessions. And when Whakatane’s Grand Theatre showed *Broadway Melody*, so many travelled over rough roads from isolated settlements such as Te Puke that a special 11:30 p.m. session had to be held. Haworth, *Father and Son*, pp.23-5

¹⁷ ‘Should We Revolt Against Hollywood?’ *NZ Magazine*, 23/6 1944 /Nov-Dec, p.22

¹⁸ Mirams, *Speaking Candidly*, p.5

Miram's claims had statistical support. New Zealand had one cinema seat for every six New Zealanders; the American ratio was one in twelve. In New Zealand there was one 'picture theatre' for every 3000 of the country's population, while the United States had one for every 8700 people.¹⁹ By 1947 there were 33.6 cinemas for every 100 000 people, in contrast to 12.5 in the U.S.A., 11.3 in Britain and 20 in Australia. In 1943-4 each person on average attended the cinema on 23.4 occasions that year.²⁰ A decade later that average was 18.1, which ranked New Zealand second only to the United Kingdom (25.0) on international attendance figures and ahead of the United States, which ranked fourth with a figure of 16.4.²¹

It is indicative of film's popularity in New Zealand for at least six decades, and its role as a focus of New Zealand communal and recreational activity during this period, that both biographies and literature fondly reference both the cinema and its American connotations. Keith Sinclair described how in the late 1920s '[o]n Saturday afternoons most of the kids used to go to matinees at the picture theatre, the *Ambassador*the children ...screamed with delight at the cartoons and western serials'.²² Janet Frame's account of her youthful enthusiasm for the cinema emphasises American filmstars:

Now that we "went to the pictures" every week, a new selection of ambitions in a completely new world was offered to us. Myrtle, who did resemble Ginger Rogers with her golden hair, planned to be a dancer or a film star or both.... I had dreams of being a blind violinist, but, more practically, because I had curly hair and dimples, I also saw myself as perhaps another Shirley Temple.²³

When James K. Baxter wrote a lyrical account of his teaching life in the remote settlement of Akitio in the fifties, he depicted the local 'cinema' as the focus of the small community's entertainment. Films were shown every second Saturday in the 'landing shed' ...a large barnlike structure near the beach on the property of a local farmer and used until the nineteen-forties for storing wool'. Baxter described how 'the older children send out written notices for these showings...

Dec.15th, *An American In Paris*, Gene Kelly, Leslie Caron
Dec. 26th, *Above and Beyond*, Robert Taylor, Eleanor Parker
Jan. 5th, *The Great Waltz*, Militza Korjas

¹⁹ Miram's, *Speaking Candidly*, p.6

²⁰ Motion Picture pp.5-6, Appendix #22; IA 59/18 Motion Pictures review of Policies and Legislation (1920-1970); Part III Appendix Table 1 Archives New Zealand, (ANZ), LE 1 1292 1947/9 p.164 'Exhibition Trends: Number, Ownership and Type of Cinema (1934 -1969; IC1 1207 27/1/1 Part 1, ANZ

²¹ *New Zealand Official Year Book 1945*, p.623; *New Zealand Official Year Book 1957*, p.1142

²² Sinclair, Keith, *Halfway Round the Harbour: an Autobiography* (Auckland: Penguin, 1993), p.31.

²³ Janet Frame, *To the Is-Land* (New York: George Braziller, 1983), p.92

Feb. 2nd, *David Copperfield*, Fred Bartholemew, W.C. Fields ²⁴

Kendrick Smithyman's 1962 poem, 'Outlooks' also portrays the New Zealand film-going experience as a communal event and social highlight.

Years ago, on Saturday
Nights, farmers and villagers,
Timbermen and gumdiggers,
My fable's staunchest people
Not wholly predictable
Nor all to be believed
Having little they believed
In but their deluded strength
To endure, their common breath
Not purposed for glory's end,
Would stay the work of the hand
To get to the picture-show...
Yet, as we looked hard abroad
On the world which was displayed
To us in our village Hall,
There was a question: Does all
Go shivering, screened by rain?²⁵

This primal sense of the audience participating in a communal experience can also be found in that most cinematic of New Zealand novelists, Ronald Hugh Morrieson. As Daniel Craig points out, Morrieson's superb novel *The Scarecrow* utilises the serial conventions of 1950s Hollywood horror and *noir* films.²⁶ It contains an affectionate description of the cinema of Klynham, the fictional stand-in for Hawera hometown of his childhood and adolescence in the interwar years.

It was a big draughty barn of a place, but many happy hours we spent therein....I recall it fondly the way it was in the days when Les and I sat enthralled by a serial picture called 'The King of Diamonds', and the kids stamped on the floor and whistled at each certificate of approval, unless it was a travel film and then they hooted and groaned. There was always a chance of my bare arm brushing against the electrically charged flesh of Josephine McClinton again as we crowded down the stairs at interval, or even maybe, some day, fluking a seat alongside her. There were big pictures of Tom Mix and Robert Montgomery and June Withers on the walls of the stairway....²⁷

²⁴ James K. Baxter, 'Akitio: A Country School and Its Community', *Education*, August 1958, p.45. All the films listed are American.

²⁵ Kendrick Smithyman, 'Outlooks', *Inheritance* (Hamilton: Paul's Book Arcade, 1962), pp.61-2

²⁶ David Craig, 'Taranaki Gothic and the Political Economy of New Zealand Narrative and Sensibility', *New Zealand Sociology*, Vol.20, No.2 (2005), p.27

²⁷ Ronald Hugh Morrieson, *The Scarecrow* (Auckland: Heinemann, 1976), p.5

Morrieson deftly conveys the setting and appeal of the cinema –even in its guise as a Taranaki ‘fleapit’ - as a New Zealand site for youthful sexual frisson and collective exuberance and escapism.

III

Why was cinema, which essentially meant American cinema, so popular and so emotionally and culturally resonant in New Zealand for over half a century? Richard Waterhouse’s comprehensive explanation for the initial appeal of movies to Australians surely applied to New Zealanders: the combination of low prices, the medium’s technological novelties and its ‘adaptability to the rhythm of city life, providing a range of sessions to cater to a variety of recreational needs’.²⁸ For Mirams, local enthusiasm for movies reflected New Zealand’s geographic isolation and the consequent expense and difficulty of importing other cultural forms: ‘... films can be packed in cans’.²⁹ Bruce Babington suggests that until the late arrival of television in New Zealand, the nation had few highly developed non-sporting leisure activities to compete with movies.³⁰ He also argued that in geographically isolated New Zealand, before the arrival of television and the internet, movies provided one of our ‘primary windows on the world – the large windows of a small room....’³¹

The poet and essayist Peter Wells adopts a similar view. He believes that films possessed a ‘peculiar power over New Zealanders, partly because every one of us, regardless of race, is unavoidably shaped by distance.... cinema became our form of foreign travel’. Wells maintains that cinema was popular here because it offered New Zealanders a means of vicarious escape.

*Why would we want to see our own country? Didn’t it wait to ambush us the moment the lights went up, and the doors burst open and we ran out like an exploding packet of hundreds-and-thousands. Wasn’t this precisely why we were all huddled in the dark, at our votive stations? To escape the endless nausea of living in a small and distant island? To escape the prairie of asphalt, the stern ancestral eyes of our telegraph poles? Of course we didn’t want to see our own country.*³²

²⁸ Richard Waterhouse, *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure: a History of Australian Popular Culture Since 1788* (Sydney: Longman Australia, 1995), p. 181

²⁹ Gordon Mirams, “The Cinema As a Social Influence”, *Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New Zealand*, Vol.77 (1948-9), p.343; Mirams, *Speaking Candidly*, pp.8-9

³⁰ Bruce Babington, *A History of the New Zealand Fiction Feature Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p.1

³¹ Babington, *Feature Film*, p.2

³² Peter Wells, *On Going To the Movies* (Wellington: Four Winds Press, 2005), p.8; 24; 16

Wells believes that for midcentury New Zealanders, to watch a film was ‘in essence, to browse, to mope joyously through an eternal and shuffling catalogue of things we didn’t have’: vehicles, cars, modes of socialising, dressing and living. ‘We learnt how to be citizens of the world – clumsily, it must be admitted – through the dumbshow of cinema.’³³ He also believed that New Zealanders were attracted by the very technology of cinema. ‘In a country dominated by old automobiles, where anything technical could be mended and massaged so it might last, films had about them the very scent of technical invention: magic made visual’.³⁴ Hollywood made the exotic and the wondrous available to Wellington and Whakatane alike, transported the sounds and images of overseas to rich and poor, all made equal in a darkness illuminated only by a translucent and flickering cone of light, providing a feast for the starved imagination.

An officer who questioned a discussion group of 2nd NZEF personnel in 1944 on their attitudes to the ‘pictures’ concluded that ‘Servicemen and women make no bones about the motives behind picture attendance. These are either escapism or habit:

“Why do I go to the movies? Because my girl-friend (substitute ‘wife’ where applicable) likes to go out on a Saturday night.” Apart from the younger candid souls who go in pursuit of “a bob’s worth in the dark”, and that select minority who scan the advertisements to find a programme that appeals to them, the bulk of servicemen go from habit or for want of something better to do... A majority in these groups agreed that they went to see films for relaxation and amusement, though there were a few who said they went for educational reasons....³⁵

In pre-television New Zealand towns and cities, watching movies was a crucial part of a Saturday night social matrix. A visit to the ‘pictures’ was, for many, the first half of the evening’s double bill. After the cinema, many singles and couples would often walk, bike, bus or drive to the nearest dance.³⁶ Whether the moviegoer was a rowdy schoolboy rolling jaffas down the aisle during a Saturday afternoon Tim Holt western, a teenage couple on

³³ Wells, *Movies*, p.26

³⁴ Wells, *Movies*, p.18

³⁵ ‘Movies For the Millions: Soldiers Are Keen Critics’, *Korero*, Vol. 2 No.10 (22 May, 1944) p.10;12

³⁶ One Greymouth youth, who met his future wife in this way, described how ‘buses were laid on from Greymouth and return. The buses left from the picture theatres at 10 p.m. after the movies had finished ... effectively dancing commenced around 10.30....’ Reminiscences of Bernie Wood, in Georgina White, *Light Fantastic: Dance Hall Courtship in New Zealand* (Auckland: HarperCollins, 2007), p.149

their first date, or grandparents having a night out, going to ‘the pictures’ was a staple of New Zealand communal life for decades.³⁷

IV

An enduring dichotomy in the reception of movies was established from the earliest screenings of feature films in New Zealand. Films, comics and swing all received an enthusiastic reception from the general public. Yet the nation’s cultural custodians regarded them with suspicion. They demonised them as sources of virulent moral and cultural contamination from which New Zealanders, especially the young, must be insulated and protected. Most of these negative responses to the new technology were effects-driven, with movies depicted as having disastrous consequences for social, civic, educational and ethical behaviours.

‘[F]rom the moment that movies revealed themselves as the most potent form of mass entertainment yet devised,’ claims a recent historian of American cinema, ‘it was inevitable that their content, and the question of who if anyone should oversee it, should spark conflict’.³⁸ As Francis Couvares points out, since the commercialisation of leisure in the late eighteenth century, so-called ‘cheap amusements’ such as the penny press and the popular theatre were regarded by social and political elites with disdain and suspicion because they apprehended them as arousing powerful emotional responses in what they perceived as ‘an untrustworthy public’.³⁹ Within America itself the culture produced by mass entertainments was constantly attacked by what Paul Gorman calls its ‘genteel critics’ who objected to its perceived vulgarity, indulgence and materialism.⁴⁰

Cultural custodians in New Zealand emulated their paternalistic American, Canadian, Australian, and Europe counterparts in immediately setting about prescribing this new medium. In 1916 the New Zealand Parliament passed the Cinematograph-Film Censorship Act, which established film censors empowered to issue certificates of approval to permit films to be shown in theatres. Parliament accepted the arguments of cultural and

³⁷ Charlotte Greenhalgh notes the importance of movie-going as a New Zealand courtship ritual in the inter-war era in her article ‘Bush Cinderellas: Young New Zealanders and Romance at the Movies’, *New Zealand Journal of History* Vol.44, No.1 (2010), pp.1-21

³⁸ “When Hollywood Dared” – Geoffrey O’Brien, *New York Review of Books*, 2 July 2009, p.6

³⁹ Francis Couvares, ‘Introduction’, in Couvares, ed, *Movie Censorship and American Culture* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), p. 2

⁴⁰ Paul R Gorman, *Left Intellectuals and Popular Culture in Twentieth Century America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), pp.13-16

civic guardians who expressed concerns about the deleterious effects of this new form of culture. They were intent on regulating it, ostensibly for the moral and cultural benefit of New Zealanders, especially the young and those considered susceptible. The Minister of Internal Affairs pointed out that the bill was the result of demands by the New Zealand Catholic Federation,⁴¹ which had gathered under its aegis a cluster of other religious groups, educational authorities, women's organisations and town councils. The claims of these groups foreshadowed later attempts by such groups to restrict American culture. They alleged that it was the duty of 'healthy-minded people' to protect the public, especially children, from 'the horrible influence of these picture-shows', which constituted 'a stream of pollution'.⁴² In vain did one M.P., John Payne, demand specific evidence of on-screen immorality. As he noted, the Catholic Federation was primarily agitated about what it claimed were anti-Catholic sentiments in some films.⁴³ Claims about the protection of public morality were protective coloration that disguised the chief motive of the Federation, and ensured the support of other moral and civic guardian and child-saver groups.

By the early 1920s public notables like Christchurch M.P. Leonard Isitt were insisting that cinemas were 'a source of mental dissipation' which endangered home life and 'thousands of our young people'.⁴⁴ Throughout the next four decades, members of civic and educational elites denigrated films as decadent and salacious. According to Roger Openshaw

educational professionals [in the post-1918 period] reinforced the picture of unsophisticated New Zealand youth seduced by the power of the moving pictures.... There is little doubt that most of this moral outrage was directed at American films.⁴⁵

The crucial roles in this influential discourse portraying such films as dangerous and malevolent were initially provided by the New Zealand Educational Institute, and, especially, Dr. Truby King, the patron saint of New Zealand childcare. In 1920 the

⁴¹ The Federation had earlier proposed joint action against 'indecent literature' with its Australian counterpart. That body was also working to prevent the screening of 'objectionable films'. *Grey River Argus*, 8 April 1915, p.2

⁴² *Evening Post*, 8 January 1913, p.2; 2 December 1915, p.3; NZPD Vol.177 (1916), p.572; pp.574-577; *Grey River Argus*, 17 June 1916, p.2; Graham Owen, 'Expectations, Panic and Change: The Early Years of Motion Pictures in New Zealand', in Margot Fry, ed, *A Century of Film in New Zealand: Papers From the Conference 'Cinema, Film & Society', Wellington October 1996* (Wellington: Stout Research Centre, 1996), pp.23-24. In 1915 the Catholic Federation organised a conference attended by 45 organisations, including local bodies, education boards, church groups, the YMCA and the Society for the Protection of Women and Children. The conference passed a resolution demanding film censorship on the grounds that 'the class of moving pictures at present exhibited in New Zealand constitutes a grave danger to the moral health of social welfare of the community'. *Evening Post*, 2 December, 1915, p.3; *Grey River Argus*, 17 June 1916, p.2;

⁴³ NZPD, Vol. 177 (1916), p.573

⁴⁴ NZPD, Vol. 193 (1921), cited Harrison, p.104

⁴⁵ Roger Openshaw, "'The Glare of Broadway': Some New Zealand Reactions to the Perceived Americanisation of Youth", *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, Vol.10 No.1 (July 1991), pp.50-1

conference of the Royal New Zealand Society for the Health of Women and Children, established by King and his wife in 1907, produced a document entitled *Picture Shows. Their Evil Effects on Children, and the Need for Reform, Regulation, and Control*. The conference approved a remit denouncing movies as ‘injurious to children and young persons’. Other remits demanded ‘That censorship of the pictures should be stricter’ and ‘That pictures for children should be controlled by the Government, through the Education Department....’⁴⁶

King alleged that ‘some of the picture shows are the most degrading things of our age, and have the most damaging influence imaginable. They require to be absolutely censored with regard to children.’ King supported the NZEI in its ‘effort ... to safeguard and protect children from the pernicious influence of moving pictures’. He listed appropriate subjects for the ‘cinematograph’ for ‘all ages’. They were all documentaries: ‘...illustrating travel, scenery, science, industry, animal and vegetable life....’⁴⁷ To King, cinema was acceptable only in the form of what Caroline Daley calls ‘rational recreation’.⁴⁸ He believed that leisure for New Zealanders should provide edification rather than enjoyment, a mindset that years later still characterised a number of elitist reactions to films.

King located cinemas as places of almost magically irresistible temptation to the young - ‘brightly lit, gilded picture palaces which absolutely fascinate the rising generation of today.... every child nowadays comes under the spell of the motion picture’.⁴⁹ This juvenile audience were shown ‘all that is most despicable and damnable in human nature’, enacted by ‘the coarsest and most debased of human beings’ – actors portraying ‘by unmistakable, exaggerated expressions and gestures the very feelings, passions and depravities from which children should be shielded.’⁵⁰ The content of ‘Picture shows’, King contended, adversely affected

the rising generation of children and adolescents.... the whole atmosphere and presentation of life tends to be on a low plane, and fills the young mind with wrong impressions and conceptions as to life’s true values, and as to what should be the aims and ideals of thought, feeling and conduct.⁵¹

⁴⁶ King *Picture Shows*, p.1

⁴⁷ King, *Picture Shows*, p.4

⁴⁸ Caroline Daley, ‘Modernity, Consumption, and Leisure’, in Giselle Byrnes, ed, *New Oxford History* (Oxford:: Oxford University Press, 2009), Ch.17

⁴⁹ King, *Picture Shows*, p.8

⁵⁰ King, *Picture Shows* p.2

⁵¹ King, *Picture Shows* p.12

Yet while presenting cinema theatres as sites of dangerous enchantment and malign enthrallment, the American film cited by King was also condemned for its realism. He deplored its verisimilitude.

There was no faking: the cinematograph people had spared no pains to present to the life one of the lowest down hells in the Bowery. Instead of employing mere stock actors they had assembled actual blackguards, actual noted criminals, and actual prostitutes, in order to show, with perfect realism, the vice of New York at its worst!⁵²

Throughout the 1920s and for decades later, elites consistently claimed that American films led astray the New Zealand cinema-going public. Although the 1927-8 Royal Commission on the Moving Picture Industry in Australia refuted contentions that movies were linked to juvenile crime contributed to criminal behavior,⁵³ New Zealand cultural guardians insisted that Hollywood encouraged crime and immorality. It was also responsible for lapses of taste and incorrect speech by the populace. In 1929 a Legislative Councillor, H. Thomson, condemned U.S. films as full of ‘sickly sentiment and a good deal of vulgarity....’⁵⁴ He was concerned about their influence on susceptible New Zealanders, and demanded the Education department get ‘rid of this wretched American sentiment and rubbish....’⁵⁵ He cited Spenceley Walker, ex-President of the New Zealand Educational Institute, who referred to concerns about ‘the very grave danger of the Americanization of our speech and our ideas’ by cinema.⁵⁶ As in Australia, a constant source of complaint about Hollywood films was their slang and pronunciation, both of which were frequently perceived as both unBritish and vulgar. ‘The American dialect and the barbarous “Yankee” intonation always grate on one’ complained a Christchurch viewer of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. ‘Whoever is responsible should see should see that the interests of good English and good taste such rubbish is not inflicted on the people of New Zealand’.⁵⁷

Two years later Thomson reiterated these concerns about the elocutionary and cultural standards of New Zealanders by urging the government to direct the film censor ‘to

⁵² King, *Picture Shows*, p. 11

⁵³ ‘Film and Child: Crime Connection Says Negligible’, *Evening Post*, 26 May 1928, p.10. The *Post*’s article was a detailed summary of the Commission’s work and Report: *Royal Commission on the Moving Picture Industry in Australia*, Parliamentary Paper 227, 1926-1928.

⁵⁴ Cited Harrison, ‘Motion Picture Industry’, pp.192-3. Thomson was speaking in 1929.

⁵⁵ NZPD, Vol. 233 (1929), p.1050

⁵⁶ NZPD, Vol. 233 (1929), p.1048. Thomson also complained that ‘the low type of American picture generally shown at the Saturday-afternoon matinees not only must have an effect upon the speech, but it has a more positive danger in the ideas that are suggested. I need not refer so much to sexual and problem pictures, which are frequently shown, but to those that show a perverted idea of justice and a glorification of the criminal and the bandit’. NZPD, Vol. 233, (1929) p.1048.

⁵⁷ Clipping, *Press*, 30 November 1933, Film Censor’s Office IA 83 15, ANZ

purge, as far as possible, the vile American accents of many of the “talkie” films and the sickly sentimental psuedo-morality which seeks its inspiration among the lowest social strata of the population’.⁵⁸ He insisted that the New Zealand audiences of Hollywood movies lacked the cultural taste and judgement of their social and educational superiors. He disparaged the audience who viewed the session of *Broadway Melody* he attended in 1929: ‘it is deplorable that the taste of the people should be so reduced as to find its mental pabulum in.... [such films]’.⁵⁹ Such patronising attitudes were occasionally refuted. In 1934 Hamilton’s *Cinema News* defended

the people who go to shows to enjoy themselves in their own way and not to cause themselves perpetual headaches in looking for points to criticize. The superior ones of the earth have ever been above the things that entertain the ordinary majority.⁶⁰

However, the overwhelming civic and intellectual consensus of the interwar era denigrated New Zealand cinema-going audiences. Several editorials in the *Otago Daily Times* in the 1930s insisted that movies were of dubious artistic quality precisely because they aimed to appeal to the general New Zealand public, which the *Times* perceived as having lower standards of taste and aesthetic judgement than their social and cultural superiors. The cultural taste and intelligence of that wider audience were derided.

Its circle of admirers is much wider than that embracing lovers of good music, readers of fine books, or patrons of the other fine arts.... The backbone of the public support ...[for] the film industry is provided by the millions who may never care for any other music than jazz and songs of sentiment, and who may depend for their reading upon the daily newspaper and regard art as only those coloured prints that depict homely scenes at the fireside or the shaggy Highland cattle standing bleakly amidst extraordinarily purple heather.

Such an audience, passive and intellectually undemanding, was highly susceptible to detrimental influences from films. Unfortunately for them, and unlike the minority of ‘discerning picture-goers’, the impact of cinema was likely to be damaging, for films frequently dealt with ‘disagreeable’ subjects ...the more sordid aspects of life’. Consequently, New Zealand cinemagoers required protection from these unsavoury features.⁶¹

According to the *Times*, movies were an inferior aesthetic experience compared with stage drama. In cinema, especially American cinema, ‘the mind was diverted from thinking to seeing, from a study to a spectacle....’ Whereas the ‘higher type of mind’ sought drama as

⁵⁸ Attorney-General to Minister of Internal Affairs, Internal memo, 24 July, 1936, cited in Blythe, p.34

⁵⁹ NZPD, Vol.233 (1929), p.1049

⁶⁰ *Cinema News*, 2 June 1934, p.4 The magazine was published by Hamilton cinema-owners.

⁶¹ ‘Unpleasant Films’, *Otago Daily Times*, 6 January 1932, clipping, Film Censor’s Office file, A 83 15, ANZ

a source for intellectual reflection, the ‘common type’ required emotional satisfaction, mere passive entertainment of the senses, ‘untutored by introspective analysis’. From this perspective, there was a division between cinema and its more refined and culturally correct counterpart, stage drama. There was also a split between their respective audiences, the one large but unthinking, and the other, smaller but refined and thoughtful. Talkies, in the *Times*’ perception, possessed an immediate, visceral but superficial appeal to the senses, not the intellect. American films were especially guilty of this cultural crime, for they were initially aimed at

the vast, psychologically callow congeries of humanity gathered in the great cities of the New World, the more especially as the perilous and picturesque experiences with natives have been succeeded by the viler perils and animalism of gangsters.

What especially concerned the *Times* was the imminent threat to New Zealand youth presented by the ‘ethical standards of the lower grades of the New World’ insinuating themselves here by way of Hollywood movies. Thus vigilance was needed to ensure ‘the foul sewers of man’s lower nature are not paraded on the public screen’.⁶²

Lamentation about Hollywood’s salacious influence was frequently combined with an exaltation of the moral and social virtues of British films. In 1921 an indignant citizen wrote to the Minister of Internal Affairs complaining that the preponderance of American films was undesirable in a country with a British cultural heritage ‘native to us’.⁶³ In 1934 the Governor-General Lord Bledisloe claimed ‘all right-minded people’ wanted the New Zealand public to demand a ‘wholesome type of [cinematic] entertainment’ in lieu of the current demand for ‘unsavoury, unwholesome, morally defiling pictures’. These, he recommended, should be replaced by ‘good, sound’ British films.⁶⁴ Moral entrepreneurs who compared American and British movies emphasised the perceived vulgarity and coarseness of the former. In 1930 Mrs N. Molesworth, Inspector for the Society for the Protection of Women and Children, claimed ‘British films are not so pointedly disregarding of the decencies of life, nor do they unduly emphasise the unpleasant or the suggestive’.⁶⁵ Two years later the Women’s Institutes of New Zealand resolved that ‘English films’ be

⁶² ‘The Film’, *Otago Daily Times*, 22 April 1933, clipping, Film Censor’s Office, IA 83 15, ANZ

⁶³ J. Robertson to W. Downie Stewart, 25 July 1921, IA. 13/11/56 Pt 1, cited Harrison, ‘Motion Picture Industry in New Zealand’, p.121, ANZ

⁶⁴ Clippings *Auckland Star*, 17 June, 21 June 1932, Film Censor’s Office IA 83 15, ANZ

⁶⁵ Clipping, *NZ Truth*, 8 May 1930, Film Censor’s Office IA 83 15, ANZ

supported and that ‘foreign’ films that ‘lowered the standard of morality and good taste’ be ‘eliminated’.⁶⁶

However, the imperial loyalties of interwar New Zealand moviegoers did not extend to British films. A local cinema manager observed that patrons ‘will not pay to see British talkies simply because they are British. The demand is for quality, and experience has shown that in this direction America is ahead of Britain’. When the Auckland cinema impresario Henry Hayward set up the London Theatre to show only British films in 1928, ‘Everyone thought it a happy idea; but the Box Office said “No!”’ After eight weeks Hayward’s experiment ended in failure.⁶⁷ Some New Zealanders felt that British films were so bad that they imperiled Britain’s ‘racial prestige’ abroad.⁶⁸

Racism itself played a role in perceptions of American cinema during these formative interwar years. In 1936 the Attorney-General agonized over the influence of Hollywood on the street culture of some young Maori. They

dress and act the part of ...[film] characters ...usually the characters of the wild west films. That the films do have a strong suggestive influence is thus clear and that this influence is in the direction of increasing crime is also clear.⁶⁹

The Film Censor’s files contain letters complaining about the presence of negro music and negro actors in American musical films, which were especially popular in New Zealand with the arrival of ‘talkies’. W.W. Tanner, the censor in the 1930s, agreed. In January 1931 he described how he dealt with such films: ‘he had blocked all of them’. According to Tanner, ‘the general public did not know what they had been protected from’, namely cabaret and other scenes set in ‘surroundings of low quality’.⁷⁰ Other public officials also condemned Hollywood musicals as indecent. T.B. Strong, the Director of Education in the late 1920s, blamed ‘Yankee cinematograph pictures’ for their ‘insidious influence on our young folk’. He told Wellington Girls’ College pupils and parents of his objection to cabaret sequences

⁶⁶ ‘Affairs of Women’, *Evening Post*, 1 May 1931, p.6

⁶⁷ Henry Hayward, *Here’s to Life! The Impressions Confessions and Garnered Thoughts of a Free-minded Showman* (Auckland: Oswald-Sealy, 1944), p.130; Elliott, ‘Anzac, Hollywood’, p.99 Elliot interviewed a retired suburban projectionist who commented that at his Ponsonby theatre members of the public would ring the cinema in advance of a double screening. If they found out that the first film on the double-bill was British, they would arrive at halftime. Cited Elliott, ‘Anzac, Hollywood’, p.100

⁶⁸ Clipping, *Christchurch Times*, 5 April, 1930; clipping, *Greymouth Evening Star*, 30 July 1931, Film Censor’s Office IA 83 15, ANZ

⁶⁹ Attorney-General to Minister of Internal Affairs, Internal memo, 24 July, 1936, cited in Blythe, ‘From Maoriland’, p.34. This attitude had a long life. In 1954 the Manawatu branch of the National Council of Women complained that ‘poor films often went to the suburban country, and predominantly Maori districts, where the spectators were the least able to withstand their influence’. *Manawatu Daily Times*, 8 November 1954, clipping, Film Censor’s Office IA 83, ANZ

⁷⁰ Clippings of interview with Censor, *Christchurch Times*, 12 January 1931, *Taranaki News*, 13 January 1931, Film Censor’s Office IA 83 15, ANZ

which not only included an 'unashamed exhibition of female nakedness', but also contained slang 'characteristic of the less-educated American'.⁷¹

V

The preponderance of American films in the cinematic diet of New Zealanders, and Hollywood's role as the crucial disseminator of American social and cultural mores, had caused concern and even anger from the beginning of commercial cinema. These concerns were reiterated across the Tasman, in North America and in the United Kingdom.⁷² In 1926, for example, New Zealand's High Commissioner in London, James Parr, an influential and prominent figure in Auckland and national politics for decades,⁷³ declared that the most influential factors in New Zealand since 1910 had been 'motor cars and the cinema'. He claimed that ninety-five per cent of films shown here were 'cheap, trashy American' movies, which disseminated 'pernicious un-British propaganda'. The British Empire was endangered by 'the Americanisation of the Dominions and the Colonies by Hollywood'.⁷⁴ That year the Minister of Internal Affairs advised Prime Minister Gordon Coates that although it was 'questionable' whether films deleteriously affected the adult mind,

⁷¹ Clipping, *Evening Post*, 12 December 1929, Film Censor's Office IA 83 15, ANZ. A Wellington movie-goer complained about an American musical because its dancing incorporated 'sinuous movement of arms and legs and brevity of dress'. Clipping, *Dominion*, 19 July 1929, Film Censor's Office IA 83 15, ANZ

⁷² Most of the films shown here and in Britain during the decade and a half since 1914 were American simply because the effect of the first world war was to severely curtail British film production and greatly increase that of its American counterpart, thereby establishing a pattern of U.S. domination of global film production and distribution. Concerns of cultural claims-makers about the transmission of American cultural and social values through the cinema were frequently found in Australia in the interwar period. As Sonia Walker and Jill Matthews have shown, similar Australian groups expressed alarm that not only were American films asinine and crass; they were also 'anti- Empire' enablers of the Americanisation of Australian life. Thus for what Matthews describes as the 'progressive intelligentsia' of Sydney, 'the romance of Hollywood was tawdry, its glamour cheap and sentimental, its citizenship demotic and vulgar'. According to the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1921, 'pictures have been a very potent factor in the injection of an inferior American ferment into our veins'. Matthews, 'Beatrice Maude Tildesley Goes to the Pictures'

<www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/firstrealesae/fr_16/jjmfr16.html> In 1926 Commonwealth film censors urged 'a little more refinement and less vulgarity' in films and recommended that legislative action be taken to increase the proportion of British films shown in Australia.⁷² The next year the Commonwealth government established a royal commission to investigate American 'monopolisation' of film distribution in Australia. Early in 1928 it recommended an 'Empire Quota' starting at five per cent; this was virtually the only important suggestion given legislative force. Walker, 'Film Censorship... Western Australia', Section 68; Sections 90-1; Sections 111-112.

⁷³ Parr was an influential but now overlooked figure in Auckland politics, national politics and educational policy in the first third of the twentieth century. He combined right-wing stances on unions with liberal attitudes towards education. See Graham W. A. Bush. 'Parr, Christopher James - Biography', Dictionary of New Zealand Biography. Te Ara - the Encyclopedia of New Zealand, updated 1-Sep-10 URL:

<<http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/biographies/3p10/>>, accessed 29 December 2010.

⁷⁴ 'Influence of Foreign Films', *Evening Post*, 13 October 1926, p.11

pictures of “high Life” and general dissipation depicted in many American films give young people, and especially young girls, an absolutely false ideal of living, and tend to make them dissatisfied as well as installing a laxness of manners and morals.

He insisted that ... ‘it would be far preferable to us, as a British community, to have British scenes, actions, manners, life and speech depicted instead of those of America or any other country’.⁷⁵ These apprehensions about the cinematic infiltration of American mores into ‘British’ nations were addressed when Coates returned from the 1927 Imperial Conference in London. The impact of American movies had been discussed there, with the result that in 1928 the New Zealand parliament debated the 1928 Cinematograph Film bill.⁷⁶ The key provisions of this legislation imposed a quota; by the end of 1929 five per cent of films must be of British origin, with the proportion rising to twenty per cent by 1939.⁷⁷ In Coates’ words, this provision ‘cop[ied] almost exactly the legislation adopted in the Old Country’ the previous year, thereby enacting ‘the expressed wish’ of the Conference ‘that the Dominions should ... fall into line and assist the production of films within the British empire’. He was unequivocal about the legislation’s aim:

its purpose is to give our people, particularly the younger ones, a clearer idea of British history, of British countries, and of British customs and ideals. I think we all recognize the great importance of bringing before our people the institutions and heroic events of our nation, and of imbuing them with a livelier sense of British ideals.... I feel it is of the greatest importance that our people should have a true perspective of events as seen through British eyes.⁷⁸

Waitemata’s M.P. Alexander Harris supported Coates’ concerns over American films as a transmitter of American values. He claimed that ‘it is undesirable that our boys and girls who frequent picture-theatres should have nothing but the Stars and Stripes put in

⁷⁵ R.F. Bollard to Coates, 20 July 1926, IA 13 /11/56 Pt. One, ANZ, cited in Harrison, ‘Motion Picture Industry in New Zealand’, p.136

⁷⁶ Similar concerns about American domination of film supply were also expressed in interwar western Europe. According to G.Nowell-Smith over 80% of films shown in Britain and Italy were American. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, ‘Introduction’, in Nowell-Smith and S.Ricci, eds, *Hollywood and Europe: Economics, Culture, National Identity 1945-95* (London: British Film Institute, 1998), p.3 Ruth Vesey shows that during the twenties several European nations such as Germany, Hungary, France and Austria as well as Britain introduced measures to resist Hollywood’s domination of their screens. Ruth Vesey, ‘Foreign Parts: Hollywood’s Global Distribution and the Representation of Ethnicity’ in Francis Couvares, ed, *Movie Censorship and American Culture* (Washington:Smithsonian Institute Press, 1996), p.214

⁷⁷ Cinematograph Film Act 1928 19.Geo V. NZ Statutes, pp.244-261; Schedule Two, p.260

⁷⁸ NZPD Vol. 219 (1928), pp. 324-5. In 1926 Coates told Parliament that ‘[t]he undesirability of presenting to the growing generation of New Zealanders’ ideals and viewpoints that are not British cannot be over-emphasized’. NZPD, Vol.211 (1926), p.131, cited in Harrison, ‘Motion Picture Industry in New Zealand’, p.121

front of them'.⁷⁹ Similar sentiments were expressed by Wellington North's M.P., Sir John Luke. He maintained that the proposed quota was necessary because

[i]t is very evident that attending the picture-shows week after week, as most of the young people of this country do, and seeing nothing but American films ... is not at all helpful to them, and is not building up a national character along the lines we so much desire'.⁸⁰

Another M.P. even objected to 'the showing of films from any British-speaking country other than Great Britain and the dominions....'⁸¹

It took the future Prime Minister George Forbes to inject some liberal arguments into the debate. He declared that he could not 'see the necessity' of inculcating British values in New Zealander movie audiences by insisting that they see a certain proportion of British films. Whereas some parliamentarians asserted that New Zealanders' movie-watching preferences required paternalistic guidance and control in order to preserve their British identity, Forbes maintained that they were perfectly capable of making their own choices. A national identity, he argued, could not be imposed from above; it must grow from within.

The public wish to see what they consider interesting or amusing. There is no use trying to force indifferent films, even of British origin, on the people of New Zealand.... the same kind of restriction could be placed upon the literature brought into this country.

Forbes, unlike some of his contemporaries in the civic elites, had faith in the New Zealand public's cultural judgement. He admitted that New Zealanders didn't watch British films simply because they regarded that country's cinema as inferior to its American counterpart. '[I]t is absolutely hopeless to attempt to foist on the people by compulsion something that has not merit.' He denied that the 'influence' of American films was eroding ties with Britain. 'British sentiment was never stronger in this country than it is at present, and I do not believe that the showing of British films or American films will affect it in the slightest degree.' Forbes also rejected claims that New Zealanders' national identities were bending in the direction of the United States as a result of the cultural buffeting inflicted by American culture.

Our attachment to the Mother-country has not grown up like a hot-house plant, it has grown strongly without any artificial aid; and the suggestion that it is necessary to foster a proper British spirit by insisting in [sic] the showing of British films is unwarranted. New Zealanders are quite able to see films and read literature produced by other than Britishers without allowing themselves to be detached in their regard for the Empire.... Our affection for the Old Land has been, and is, based on ties of blood and common interests. I do not

⁷⁹ NZPD Vol. 219 (1928), p. 332

⁸⁰ NZPD Vol. 219 (1928), p. 341

⁸¹ NZPD Vol. 219 (1928), p. 347

think it is such a sickly plant that we need to exclude from this country the films of foreign lands.⁸²

Forbes's description of America as 'foreign' is revealing. It signifies an insistence – at least by New Zealand's interwar political elite - that the U.S.A. was not considered an integral aspect of a wider Anglophone community, and that America remained for some a culture and society alien to New Zealand's ostensibly British cultural heritage.

The debate over film quotas was doubly significant. Not only did it reveal that concerns over the impact of American culture were now included alongside traditional issues such as trade and defence as providing parameters for defining New Zealand's imperial relationship with Britain. It also enables us to view in a fresh perspective James Belich's thesis that the interwar era was part of a decades-long process of 'recolonisation'. The passage of the 1928 statute, with its use of British legislation as a template, and the insistence of some parliamentarians that quotas were necessary to maintain the nation's British 'tradition', initially suggests that the dominion was indeed renewing its cultural and emotional links with the United Kingdom. Yet the very fact that it was found necessary to consider such legislation at all, and to voice concerns about the strength and efficacy of these ties, indicates that New Zealand's relationship with the 'mother country' was evolving and expanding its parameters rather than relapsing into its former framework. Forbes' attitude to the quotas shows an acceptance of this trend. He was not denying or rejecting the Dominion's traditional associations with Britain. Instead he argued that New Zealand had now reached a more confident stage in its development, in which cultural identity could neither be imposed by legislation nor endangered by the impact of American media such as films.

A decade after the enactment of the quota system deplored by Forbes, the government of the day made another attempt to wean New Zealanders off American film. Its ostensible aim was to improve the public's cultural quotient by imposing a healthier regime of European cinema. In January 1937 the Labour government established a Motion Picture Film Committee, probably at the behest of Minister of Education Peter Fraser.⁸³ Set up by

⁸² NZPD Vol. 219 (1928), pp.338-340

⁸³ This committee was officially called the Motion Pictures Film Industry Advisory Committee, and in some departmental documents is called the Film Industry Committee.: D.G. Sullivan to Minister of Education, Memo 27/1/1, date-stamped 18/4/38, ANZ. The trail of evidence certainly shows Fraser's, if not Savage's, abiding interest and intervention in the committee's work. Simon Sigley argues that the committee's establishment was probably the result of a directive from either Fraser or Prime Minister Sigley, Simon, 'Film Culture: Its Development in New Zealand, 1929 – 1972', (Ph.D thesis, University of Auckland, 2003), p.198. Sigley is invaluable on the development of 'high' film culture in New Zealand.

D.G. Sullivan, the powerful Minister of Industries and Commerce, and chaired by James Shelley, Director of Broadcasting,⁸⁴ its members included the film censor W.W. Tanner, and the government M.P. John Robertson, who belonged to the Wellington Film Society, a group devoted to promoting the showing and distribution of ‘art’ films.⁸⁵ At its initial meeting that month Sullivan informed the committee that the government intended to raise the cultural level of the ‘mass of the people’. He hoped to use cinema ‘for the advancement of the culture of the people’ and deplored the lack of those ‘first-class continental pictures shown in England’.⁸⁶ An enlarged committee, now including the Chief Inspector of Primary Schools, representing Fraser, met twice in April. It considered a report advocating an increased measure of State Control of Film Supplies’ in order to enhance the exhibition of ‘films of high cultural value’.⁸⁷ To this end the report urged the committee to investigate using the Industrial Efficiency Act to control the motion picture industry ‘in the national interest’. Committee members took the hint and concluded that the only ‘reasonable solution of the present distribution of films in New Zealand would be the substitution of state control’. Sullivan also drew attention to ‘the Prime Minister’s desire to use the exhibition of film to improve the culture of the people’. He suggested the Committee consider sourcing ‘high quality’ European films ‘which combine cultural and educational features without detracting from the entertainment appeal’.⁸⁸

Nine months later the Committee produced a report expressively titled ‘Culture in Films’, parts of which appear derived from Walter Nash’s investigations into European sources of film while overseas during 1937. The report’s anonymous author discussed the ‘educative’ use of films in England and Europe as a means of diverting New Zealanders from their deplorable preference for Hollywood entertainment.⁸⁹ A year earlier the Committee had cited Nazi Germany, Russia, Japan and France as nations whose motion picture policies incorporated ‘cultural and educational features’.⁹⁰ By 1938, according to the report, the preferred model for New Zealand to emulate was already in place: the Third Reich. The Nazi system, the report approvingly noted, included a compulsory showing of

⁸⁴ Shelley’s role in radio broadcasting, and his elitist perspectives on culture, are discussed in Ch. Three

⁸⁵ Memo 27/1/1: D.G. Sullivan to Minister of Education, date-stamped 18/4/38, Box IC1 1207 27/1/1 Part One, IA; Notes of a Conference, IC1 27/1/1; ANZ: Sigley, ‘Film Culture’, pp.196-8. His discussion pp.200-206 includes an assessment of the motives of this committee.

⁸⁶ Notes of a Conference, p.8; p.10, IC1 27/1/1, ANZ

⁸⁷ Memo from Chairman Shelley to Sullivan, 27 April 1937, IC1 27/1/1, ANZ

⁸⁸ Memo from Sullivan to MPIC, Minutes, meeting of MPFI Committee, 26 April 1937. IC1 1207 27/1/1 Part One, ANZ

⁸⁹ ‘Culture in Films’, IC 1 1 27/1/1; Part 1, ANZ

⁹⁰ Minutes of MPFI Committee, 19 April 1937, NIC1 1207 27/1/1 Part One, ANZ

short films of ‘cultural’, ‘artistic’ or ‘national’ and ‘political’ merit before the feature film. The report unsurprisingly failed to provide many details about the organisation of German cultural guidance, or to discuss their potent implications. In fact, a Reichskulturkammer, (Reich Culture Chamber) headed by Josef Goebbels, set national cultural standards, cinematic, literary and otherwise, enforced by teams of district cultural inspectors. Its stated aims were to ‘promote German culture on behalf of the German Volk and Reich’ and to ‘regulate the economic and social affairs of the culture professions’.⁹¹ This rubric included compulsory licensing of all creative artists, censorship, proscription and destruction of culture deemed ‘non-Aryan’, and purging the German cultural community of ‘non-Aryan’ members. Yet one of the bureaucrats assisting the Committee informed Sullivan that the cultural districts established under the Reichskulturkammer did carry out ‘political propaganda’.⁹²

The Committee recommended the German model of cultural indoctrination of the cinema-going public, ingenuously describing it as the ‘peaceful penetration of culture’, and claiming ‘weighty evidence in support of its introduction in the Dominion’.⁹³ It also proposed that ‘one cultural film be included in each picture programme’.⁹⁴ By such means the public could be discouraged from their preference for Hollywood cinema and their cultural intelligence enhanced. This astonishing endorsement of a fascist nation’s model of cultural ‘penetration’ occurred at a time when the terrible implications of Germany’s anti-Semitism and its violations of the Versailles treaty were becoming obvious. Book-burnings, destruction of artworks and persecution of Jews and communists were now reported in New Zealand newspapers. Yet in its eagerness to ‘improve’ the cultural standards of New Zealanders, the government considered copying the administrative techniques of a totalitarian state in order to achieve what Alan Steinweis calls ‘the political instrumentalization of culture’.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Alan Steinweis, ‘The Professional, Social, and Economic Dimensions of Nazi Cultural Policy: the Reich Theater Chamber’, *German Studies Review*, Vol.13, No.13 (October 1990), pp.442; Steinweis, *Art, Ideology, and Economics in Nazi Germany: the Reich Chambers of Music, Theater, and the Visual Arts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), pp.44-45

⁹² Typed minute from F.Johnson, Assistant Secretary, Dept of Industries and Commerce, to Sullivan, attached to Minutes of Committee meeting, 1 March 1938, IC1 1207 27/1/1 Part 1, ANZ

⁹³ Memo Film Industry Committee Memo to Sullivan, 23 March 1938; Sullivan to Minister of Internal Affairs, 29 March 1938, letter Sullivan to Minister of Internal Affairs, 14 June 1938; IC1 1207 27/1/1 Part 1, ANZ

⁹⁴ ‘Culture in Films’, IC1 1 27/1/1, ANZ; see Sigley, ‘Film Culture’, pp.204-5 for an interesting discussion of the paper’s implication for the encouragement of art film culture in the dominion.

⁹⁵ Steinweis, ‘Nazi Cultural Policy’, p.453

The same month, January 1938, that the Committee issued its recommendations, Cabinet members and a 'select few' attended a private screening of Continental films. This was part of the process of what the *Auckland Star* described as 'the education of public taste' by disseminating the 'beneficial influence of the right type of film'. The *Star* noted that the 'Film Committee' hoped to establish a cinema showing 'a better-than-usual type of film' in each main centre.⁹⁶ It also recommended that commentaries on 'outstanding films of cultural and technical quality' be broadcast, 'in order to get the people to develop a taste for a good class of film'. Sullivan was impressed. 'The idea appeals to me very much and is in line with what we want to achieve of [sic] raising the cultural standard and teaching the people to appreciate good films'.⁹⁷ In Simon Sigley's words, the Labour government hoped to 'exert some control over the consumption of popular culture'.⁹⁸

However, the Film Committee's and the government's disconnect from the horrific implications of Nazi Germany's cultural policies were about to be abruptly overtaken by a more realistic assessment of the implications of that nation's foreign policy. In March 1938 German troops marched into Austria. After June 1938, the Committee's plans for the cultural uplift of New Zealand filmgoers apparently fell into bureaucratic abeyance. Presumably the rapidly declining international situation meant that the Government had new priorities to consider. The Film Industry Board remained, but by 1949 its chief concern was 'monopoly' control by the two big local cinema chains.⁹⁹ The 1949 parliamentary inquiry into the film industry complained that 'even the best continental films ...achieved little or no popularity here'. However, the inquiry, unlike the committee of the late 1930s, believed that 'it is clearly impossible to force public taste in such matters'. Public appreciation of 'better films' (i.e. European, not American) would have to wait for the 'development of public taste and appreciation'.¹⁰⁰ The elitist sanctities of New Zealand film culture remained, but the government would not be intent on enforcing them upon the local filmgoing public.

⁹⁶ 'Film as an Art: Elevating Public Taste', *Auckland Star*, 28 January 1938, clipping in Box IC 1 1207 27/1/1 Part 1, ANZ

⁹⁷ Notes taken during interview of Film Committee with Sullivan, 28 April 1937 in IC 1 1207 27/1/1 Part 1, ANZ

⁹⁸ Sigley, 'Film Culture', p.198

⁹⁹ See 'Report of the Select Committee on the Motion Picture Industry', *passim*, Appendix I-17, *Appendices to the Annual Journal of the New Zealand House of Representatives*, 1949

¹⁰⁰ Motion Picture Industry Report, p.27

VI

Many of the features that were to characterise New Zealanders' reactions to American cinema after World War II had been established only a decade or so after the Great War. Child-savers and cultural guardians played a crucial role by emphasising the alleged 'pernicious' effects of Hollywood movies and their cultural and social site, the cinema or 'picture-house'. Such films - and the medium as a whole - were demonised as artistically inferior and a 'cheap' source of pleasure, especially for the 'lower' classes. They were also represented as dangerously seductive, a glamorous source of temptation providing beguiling images of glamour, violence and lurid sex. Influential public intellectuals like Ngaio Marsh insisted that the cinema 'had no cultural value at all.'¹⁰¹ The New Zealand cinematic audiences in such critical discourses were constantly demeaned and infantilised by opponents of American films. These critics portrayed New Zealand audiences as youthful and / or educationally and culturally immature. Hence their supposed susceptibility to endangerment by salacious Hollywood. The cinema-going public was represented as passive and complacent, in contrast to the small minority of intellectually and aesthetically perceptive and responsive New Zealanders struggling to uphold cultural standards. Movies, the cultural entrepreneurs claimed, were an instrument for the increasing Americanisation of the dominion and a threat to the British character of the nation. These issues can be seen in concerns about American slang and the numerical and box-office dominance of American movies over British films.

These interwar responses within New Zealand to American cinema were not unique to this country. Rather, they were part of a transnational discourse incorporating motifs which could be found in Sydney, Paris, London and New York, as well as in Wellington. Here, as overseas, leading civic, religious and educational figures deplored what they perceived as the deplorable moral, social and educational effects of Hollywood films. Similar denunciations by the nation's cultural guardians of American movies continued during and after World War 2. The influx of American personnel during that conflict highlighted and exacerbated such jaundiced responses. The various arguments about American films and their effects were essentially points of contention in a struggle over cultural and social authority that had been waged in New Zealand since the 1920s. This contest would intensify in the immediate postwar era.

¹⁰¹ *Evening Post*, 31 May 1944, p.4

CHAPTER SEVEN

HOLLYWOOD MOVIES AND THEIR RECEPTION, c.1944-1949

I

A few weeks after World War 2 ended, the New Zealand government held a special screening of a Hollywood movie, *Objective Burma*, its audience restricted to M.P.s. This private showing followed a controversy in England. There were claims that the movie portrayed the Allies' Burma campaign as a predominantly American struggle, ignoring the crucial role of British forces in that conflict. The parliamentarians apparently left the special showing with their imperial sentiments unruffled because *Objective Burma* was quickly made available to the New Zealand movie-going public. *Truth's* movie critic noted that its perspective was 'predominantly American', but pronounced it 'excellently photographed and produced'. That critic also observed that the film acknowledged British military advice and paid 'tribute to the British, Chinese and Indian armies that made victory in Burma possible'. *Truth* sought the opinion of some 'high-ranking' New Zealand officers, who declared that 'London must be a bit touchy just now - we can't see anything in the film to get excited about'.¹ This special screening of *Objective Burma* indicates the sensitivity of issues involving local perceptions of American films at this time. Not only were these films signifiers of cultural and social trends. They also indicated subtle shifts in imperial relationships and New Zealanders' attitudes towards both the United Kingdom and the United States. As the pragmatic local reception of *Objective Burma* showed, New Zealanders by 1945 were not reflexively endorsing British concerns that her imperial and military roles were being impugned by Hollywood.

The arrival of American troops in 1942 as a garrison force, their impact on New Zealanders and their initial mutual perceptions of each other have been portrayed by Jock Phillips as 'a Hollywood dream'. Phillips maintained that

[f]or both visitor and host it was an intriguing experience with much of the quality of a Hollywood fantasy. The American soldier found himself 'deep in the heart of the South Seas', in the words of his army-issued pocket guide. He was in a land of tree-ferns and semi-tropical 'jungle'. He usually came either before or immediately after the horror of war on a Pacific island, and he found a land of milk and honey (literally), of caring mothers and 'pretty girls'.

¹ NZPD, Vol.270 (1945) p.414; *Truth*, 3 October 1945, p.17

Phillips suggested that for New Zealanders emerging from a depression to be confronted by the horrors of war, 'the arrival of thousands of well-fed young Americans with smiles on their faces, charm in their hearts and money in their pockets was equally a Hollywood romance come briefly to life.'² He also claimed that 'the "American invasion" (as New Zealanders affectionately called the event) brought a considerable clash of cultures'.³

Many New Zealanders did indeed greet the Americans and their customs with affection. *Freedom*, the National Party newspaper, claimed of the 'American Invasion' that 'New Zealanders will long cherish the reassuring sight of thousands of American troops pouring ashore...during the dark days of the Pacific war.'⁴ A letter to the *Christchurch Star-Sun* early in 1945 extolled the 'high standards of sobriety and chivalry' displayed by the Americans, commenting that 'this type of behaviour [was] misunderstood by New Zealanders'. Others did not take kindly to this cultural and military incursion. Alec O'Donoghue, a radio broadcasting executive, blamed American troops in Auckland for initiating licentious behaviour that horrified Auckland's respectable citizenry.

More than the usual amount of drink was being consumedNew and daring methods of courtship everywhere confronted the citizens, ordinary decencies in everyday life were rapidly abandoned and modesty was no longer known to the vast majority of unmarried women who relentlessly pursued the uniformed lovesick servicemen. The position grew from bad to worse and no available remedy seemed at hand.... [the] situation ... had grown completely beyond the power of the civic and civil authorities.⁵

W.J. Scott held an equally sour view of American troops and New Zealand women. He too was obsessed with what he called '[t]he popularity of the American soldier with girls here in 1943-4'.⁶ In 1949 he wrote

[W]ithout the influence of American film (~~which invested the American soldier with glamour and promise of romance~~) fewer New Zealand girls would have fallen in love with men who were less informed and less effective persons than their New Zealand fellows. But the film had glamourized a voice; an idiom and a manner ...and the uniform and the money reinforced them to the point of irresistibility.⁷

² Jock Phillips, with Ellen Ellis, *Brief Encounter: American Forces and the New Zealand People, 1942-1945* (Wellington: Historical Branch, Dept of Internal Affairs, 1992), pp.5-6

³ Phillips, *Brief Encounter*, p.5

⁴ *Freedom*, 6 April 1949, p.9

⁵ Alec O'Donoghue, *The Rise and Fall of Radio Broadcasting in New Zealand: the Tragedy of Government Control and Management* (Auckland: A.F. O'Donoghue, 1946), p.28

⁶ W.J.Scott, 'Written Copy of Presentation to Film Inquiry, 1949' IC 1 Box 1207 27/1/1 Pts 1 & 2, 3A, Archives New Zealand, Wellington, (ANZ)

⁷ Scott, 'Presentation to Film Inquiry', p.8, crossing-out as in original. Scott's compatriot Gordon Mirams claimed that 'not one in fifty of those Marines took the slightest interest in politics or in anything much beyond the immediate job in hand'. Gordon Mirams, *Speaking Candidly: Films and People in New Zealand* (Hamilton: Paul's Book Arcade, 1945), p.123

Although Scott never served in the war, he reveals a profound jealousy of the American troops' lifestyle and resentment at what he perceives as New Zealand women's regard for them. He stigmatises these women as seeking glamour and money, seduced by the false values of Hollywood. He also belittles the U.S. servicemen's intelligence and ability. His denunciations of American culture expose the extent to which animosity towards that culture derived from some New Zealand males' jealousy of the perceived sexual and material advantages of American servicemen in New Zealand.

By 1944-5, Hollywood was readily identified as the key purveyor of these apparently corrosive American influences. New Zealand cinemagoers were also portrayed as unable to resist Hollywood's seductive allure. Even as American troops were arriving here as part of the Allied campaign against Japan, the Prime Minister was condemning movies. Fraser and his Cabinet colleagues sought American military protection, yet they seemed as concerned about defending New Zealanders from American cultural influences and upholding bourgeois standards as much as they feared the Japanese military threat. One of his M.P.s complained that 'the country was becoming Americanised'.⁸ Fraser himself regarded Hollywood movies and their British 'imitat[ions]' as 'silly rubbish'. Film censorship, he complained, was failing to 'safeguard the people, and the young people.' He proposed that if 'good taste was offended', censorship could be replaced by a system of 'regulation' enforced by the courts.⁹

Fraser's concerns about 'good taste' and his insistence that the nation required protection from Hollywood's influence found frequent expression in the comments of cultural and moral custodians. One of the most significant of these was the Inter-Church Council on Public Affairs, whose attitudes and activities in relation to American comics have already been discussed.¹⁰ During the decade from 1944 -1954 the ICCPA minute books show that the organisation regarded movies with suspicion and that it was determined to restrict access to them. In 1944 the Council sent a deputation to the Prime Minister urging tighter film censorship. It also wrote to Wellington's Mayor asking why it was necessary for two theatres to be open on Sundays for showing films.¹¹ Issues of film and film poster censorship were also discussed with the Secretary of Internal Affairs the next year.

⁸ 'Banned Films', *Evening Post*, 8 December 1942, p.14

⁹ 'Banned Films', p.14

¹⁰ The ICCPA attitudes to comics has already been discussed in Chapter 4

¹¹ ICCPA Minutes, 20 October 1944, Minutes 1 December 1944, ICCPA Minute Books, MSy 1830, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, (ATL)

Throughout the next decade the ICCPA lobbied the Ministry of Internal Affairs and groups such as the YMCA and the National Council of Women about stricter film censorship.¹²

In 1947 the Manager of Wellington's Tivoli theatre defended Sunday films as 'meeting the needs of certain classes of people'. Perhaps ironically, he suggested that their spiritual needs could be met by having a 'chaplain' address the audience prior to the screening. An ICCPA sub-committee was charged with implementing this suggestion and a three-month trial was organised, with a speaker having the unenviable task of giving the audience a 'brief talk' before the commencement of the afternoon session. The Council was informed that he had received 'a good hearing'. Encouraged by this successful conjunction of the sacred and the profane, the ICCPA now hoped that such talks could be given *every* session. It then wrote to the film censor complaining about *The Outlaw*, a western in which Jane Russell's cleavage played a leading role. To counteract such salaciousness, the ICCPA discussed the possibility of 'some pastoral work to be done among those patronising the cinema on a Sunday'.¹³

These unlikely expectations demonstrated the ICCPA's enormous disconnect from the entertainment habits of New Zealanders and also its low opinion of local cinema audiences. Eight years later it was still attempting to influence the government of the day over censorship of movies. In November 1954, Father D. Ward reported on behalf of an ICCPA sub-committee recently established to monitor legislation resulting from the Mazengarb inquiry's findings. He announced that the 'potential [New Zealand cinema-going] public could be divided into three classes: [those with] Church affiliations, school children and the "great unwashed", the last-named providing the greatest number of film-goers.... The second was the most important.'¹⁴ Ward's characterisation demonstrates the propensity of many within the nation's civic and cultural elites to traduce cinema audiences as uncouth and vulgar, divided by taste and culture from the righteous. It also reveals how these elites construed their role as child-savers, determined to protect the nation's youth from a danger they could neither quantify nor verify, but which they willingly identified as predominantly American in origin.

¹² For example, see ICCPA Minutes 7 June 1946; 11 February 1947; 30 May 1947, Minute Books, MS y1837, ATL

¹³ Minutes ICCPA meetings 25 July 1947; 5 September 1947; 14 November 1947; February 1948, MS y 1837, ATL

¹⁴ Minutes meeting 26 November 1954, ICCPA Minutes, MS y 1838, ATL

II

In 1946 the ICCPA joined the Wellington Film Society with the aim of ‘seeking to create a public demand for a higher standard of film’.¹⁵ One of the founders of that organisation was W.J. Scott.¹⁶ As I have previously shown, Scott’s stance on cultural matters, especially the impact of modern media, was strongly influenced by his acceptance of Leavisite and Frankfurt school cultural critiques.¹⁷ Scott’s prescription for the cultural health of New Zealanders included regular applications of ‘high’ culture to mitigate what he regarded as the noxious effects of the public’s diet of comics and movies. New Zealand cinemagoers, Scott insisted, were a narcoticised audience, attending ‘partly because they have been taught to be film addicts, docile consumers of the innumerable fairy stories provided by the handful of men who make money out of their sale’. This situation hindered the work of ‘those who are striving to raise the artistic & social standards of the film and other extra-scholastic education agencies’.¹⁸ Accordingly, something as ‘individually and socially deleterious’ as Hollywood cinema required that ‘those responsible for the welfare of the people must do something about it’.¹⁹ This task could hardly be entrusted to ‘[b]usiness men who are themselves not well educated’. Scott urged that the film censor be ‘empowered to refuse a licence to films that are just plain bad dramatically and artistically....’²⁰ Thus Scott extended the function of film censorship from protector of public morals to arbiter of cultural values. The crucial function of cinema, along with literature and music must be educative and redemptive, was ‘to truly educate [audiences]... as worker, citizen, neighbour and home-maker’.²¹

A crucial part of this process involved sheltering youth from commercialised American influences.²² Parliament must ‘protect the cultural standards of the school against

¹⁵ Minutes of meetings 24 October 1945, November 1945; March 1946, ICCPA Minutes, ATL: MSy 1830, ATL

¹⁶ Renwick, William, “Scott, Walter James 1902-1985”. *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, updated 22 June 2007 [URL: http://www.dnzb.govt.nz](http://www.dnzb.govt.nz). Further details of Scott’s background are provided in the ‘Comics’ chapter, along with an analysis of his views on high and ‘low’ culture, and in particular, comics.

¹⁷ Several members of the WFS, according to Sigley, were ‘either members of, or sympathetic to, the Society for Closer Relations With Russia’. Simon Sigley, ‘Film Culture: Its Development in New Zealand, 1929 – 1972’ (Ph.D thesis, University of Auckland, 2003) p.241

¹⁸ Emphasis in original. W.J.Scott, ‘Written Copy of Presentation to Film Inquiry, 1949’ IC 1 Box 1207 27/1/1 Pts 1 & 2, 3A, Archives New Zealand, Wellington, (ANZ) pp.4; 6

¹⁹ Scott, ‘Presentation to Film Inquiry’, p.3

²⁰ Scott, ‘Presentation to Film Inquiry’, p.6

²¹ Scott, ‘Presentation to Film Inquiry’, p.2

²² Gordon Mirams was the chief speaker. Mirams noted a 1941 comment by an American cultural critic that ‘the present education of most people is performed by the cinema’. *Listener*, 22 June 1945, pp. 6-7. The NEF

the subversive influence of the majority of commercial films by every reasonable means....²³ The twin emphases of Scott's chapter on 'The Cinema' in *Reading, Film and Radio Tastes*, published in 1946, focused on concerns over the superficial and frivolous appeal of 'commercial' (i.e. predominantly American) films for youthful audiences, and an endorsement of literary over visual values as forms of artistic expression. Scott argued that in New Zealand's technical schools, which focused on teaching 'vocational' and 'commercial' subjects such as typing, metalwork and woodwork rather than 'academic' subjects, 'there will naturally be a larger number of boys and girls who handle words with less facility than things and to whom the picture makes a greater appeal than the book'. Because such students came from what Scott tellingly described as 'less cultivated homes', they 'did not get much encouragement to develop the habit of solid reading.... Over them therefore the film will tend to have a solid hold'.²⁴ He claimed that working-class children, 'living in the poorer areas, attended the cinema much more often than those of professional, clerical and skilled workers'.²⁵

According to Scott, the films that such audiences enjoyed lacked intellectual rigour. 'To interest as many people as possible, the intellectual content of films must be fairly simple, and will therefore be easily comprehensible by adolescents'.²⁶ He then subtly conflated this immature audience to include the wider cinema-going public. 'With its cheapness and physical comfort, as well as its easily intelligible entertainment, the cinema everywhere has a special attraction for the non-literary and those who have limited cultural opportunities'.²⁷ He blamed Hollywood for inculcating in New Zealand audiences 'a taste for the culturally shoddy, which is sometimes accompanied by belittling of the culturally superior; another is the inculcation of false ideas about life and people'. Yet during

was at that time an influential educational group, active in several countries, especially the U.S.A. and Britain. Members favoured what was then known as 'progressive' education, with an emphasis on child-centered learning. A useful account is provided by Jane Abbis, 'The "New Educational Fellowship" in New Zealand: Its Activity and Influence in the 1930s and 1940s', *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol.33, No.1 (1998), pp.81-97

²³ Scott, Presentation to Film Inquiry, p.14

²⁴ W.J.Scott, *Reading, Film & Radio Tastes of High School Boys and Girls*, Education Research Series, No.28, (Wellington: New Zealand Council of Educational Research, 1947), p.113. Nine per cent of technical students saw a film more than once a week, and forty per cent attended weekly. By comparison, three per cent of 'Secondary' [i.e. 'academic'] school pupils saw more than one film a week, and twenty-seven per cent saw more than one film a week. Table XVII 'Frequency of Attendance by Pupils at Three Types of Schools', p.113

²⁵ Scott, *Tastes*, p.113.

²⁶ Scott, *Tastes*, p.122

²⁷ Scott, *Tastes*, p.113. Boys preferred adventure and war films, while girls favoured musical, historical and romantic films, because, according to Scott, they contained 'those domestic, fanciful, romantic, personal and aesthetic elements that can be expected to appeal to the richer and more varied sensibilities of the girls. Scott, Table XXI 'Most Popular Films', *Tastes*, p.120; pp.121-2

questioning at the 1949 Motion Pictures Industry parliamentary committee Scott admitted that he rarely went to cinemas, thereby never viewing those films whose popularity he so deplored and whose aesthetic and moral failings he so confidently proscribed. His condemnations were based solely on his reading of ‘overseas’ critics.²⁸

Despite his contention that for the ‘less cultivated’, the image had more appeal than the word, Scott’s own survey revealed that the films voted most popular by students included a ‘large number’ based on books or plays. That proportion, he admitted, ‘must indicate a close relationship between film-going and reading for many pupils.... the film leads to the book more often than the book to the film’.²⁹ Yet this presumably admirable consequence of watching movies annoyed him, possibly because it suggested that filmgoers possessed greater intellectual curiosity and flexibility than he credited them.

In an atmosphere of gush and vulgarity, his mind still influenced by the vivid images of the screen, the film-goer sits down to read the book. There are, it seems to me, only two tests of his capacity to understand and enjoy it with any completeness –one is the recognition that the book is better than the film, and the other is the conversion of an habitual film-goer who sometimes reads books of this kind into an habitual reader of books of this kind who sometimes sees films.³⁰

Scott maintained the literary text was inherently superior to the cinematic discourse. A cinematic interpretation of a great literary work meant a cultural and intellectual down-sizing: ‘the best novels, with their greater freedom, range and depth, remain so far above the best the film is capable of that they cannot be transferred to the screen without dilution of their finest qualities’.³¹

He not only maligned the type of films enjoyed by New Zealand audiences as lacking the superior qualities of literary culture. Like Adorno and the *Scrutiny* cultural critics, he also insisted that mass culture, such as Hollywood movies, was inferior, deleterious and homogeneous. The commercial nature of the film industry meant ‘the tendency for the quality of films to be standardized, like every other form of mass culture, at or near the middle of the diamond [of cognitive ability]’. Consequently popular films made ‘an unknown percentage of adolescents satisfied with imaginative experiences much below

²⁸ Statement to Motion Pictures Industry committee presented by Robert Kerridge, re: Submission #29, Written Copy of Presentation to Film Inquiry, 1949: IC 1 Box 1207 27/1/1 Pts 1 & 2,3A, ANZ. In parliament, T.L. Macdonald mocked Scott’s attitude: ‘he thought he could tell the quality of pictures without seeing them....’ NZPD, Vol.287 (1949), p.2010

²⁹ Scott, *Tastes*, p.123; Table XXII, ‘Relation of Film to Book’, p.140; p.141

³⁰ Scott, *Tastes*, pp.142-143

³¹ Scott, *Tastes*, pp.142-143

the best of which they are capable.’³² Worse, the ‘general influence’ of films of the Hollywood type also served ‘to weaken the standards set by the highly educated class’ for their intellectual inferiors. Most New Zealand filmgoers, he informed the Wellington Film Society in 1946, erred in ‘equating value with entertainment’. Members of the Society, unlike the general movie-going populace, possessed aesthetic standards that prevented their making this equation.³³

This concern about the impact of commercial cinema and other forms of American popular culture on the traditional arbitrating role of an elite cultural group was fundamental to Scott’s cultural critique. So was the deep suspicion he attached to feelings of pleasure, especially those derived from such a vulgar source as Hollywood. Both views attest to his fear, shared by many New Zealand public intellectuals of his era, that the cultural norms of this ‘highly educated class’ were in danger of being ignored or rejected by those whom he regarded as lacking the intellectual and cultural muscle to confront what he described as ‘the power and persuasiveness of the popular culture’.³⁴ Scott’s solution to this cultural problem was to rely on education.

It is clear that some training in judging between the [cultural] good and bad, in their varying degrees, is necessary. Since the pupil cannot escape being influenced by the bad, his power to resist it must be carefully developed.³⁵

He had enhanced his vocation as an educationist by publicly championing a more democratic, participatory and less coercive education system. A teacher’s role, he declared, was to ‘help to ensure that the democratic principles that he is required to teach – and he is required to teach them – are embodied and expressed in the practices of society itself.’³⁶ Yet he and many of his peers never addressed the crucial issue of cultural values in that democratic New Zealand society. What if some of those values, and the media by which they were communicated, were popular with most New Zealanders and yet deemed to be meretricious and inferior by an unelected, aesthetically reactionary but politically ‘progressive’ intellectual elite whose views were often rejected, even ignored, by the very public whose cultural and civic interests they claimed to be protecting?

³² Scott, *Tastes*, p.139

³³ Scott, *Tastes*, p.139; Scott, Editorial, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, Wellington Film Institute, No.2, August 1946, unpaginated, cited in Sigley, ‘Film Culture’, p.246

³⁴ Scott, *Tastes*, p.144

³⁵ Scott, *Tastes*, p.144

³⁶ John Shallcrass, *W.J.Scott and the Liberal Tradition* (Wellington: New Zealand Council for Educational Research, 1965), p.9

III

A fellow-member of the Wellington Film Society, Gordon Mirams, shared Scott's insistence that the public required cultural uplift.³⁷ Both men combined left-wing political views with culturally conservative attitudes, along with the patrician conviction that most New Zealanders required guidance from their cultural and intellectual superiors so that they made 'correct' cultural and even political decisions. Both placed a high value on their own intellectual abilities and shrewdly used their respective networks of social, religious, educational and political contacts to advance their careers. Both regarded modern media as producing formulaic and unedifying products. By 1945 Mirams was New Zealand's best-known film critic, an active and influential member of Wellington's cultural and intellectual elite, a leading figure in Wellington 'society' and a major force in the formation of a 'film culture' in the dominion.³⁸ According to J.C. Reid, another film critic and Film Society devotee, Mirams did more than any other individual to lay the foundations of film criticism in New Zealand, to inspire the Film Society movement and to develop a heightened critical faculty in thousands of his fellow Kiwi filmgoers.³⁹

Born in 1909, Mirams came from a privileged Christchurch family background, attended Christ's College and then Canterbury University College, from which he graduated with an M.A. in History and a Diploma in Journalism. He was a pacifist whose hobbies were fencing and war-gaming, a Christian who belittled those he regarded as being of inferior intelligence, and a socialist who derided the intellectual and cultural capacities of the proletariat.⁴⁰ In his career as a journalist he eventually moved from the Christchurch *Star-Sun* to Wellington to work for what became the *Listener*. In the 1940s Mirams also worked with CORSO and the Campaign for Christian Order, a group dedicated to upholding

³⁷ In his chapter on youthful cinema-going habits in *Survey*, Scott expressed the hope that his findings would help teachers 'convert' not only their pupils, but also themselves, 'from the film fans they now are into the film critics that Mr. Mirams rightly insists we all should be'. Scott, *Tastes*, p.112.

³⁸ The Wellington Film Society in its early days was sometimes known as the Wellington Film Institute. Sigley, 'Film Culture', pp.218-219, discusses Miram's role in the development of the film society movement and film culture in Wellington and New Zealand.

³⁹ J.C. Reid, 'Gordon Mirams as Film Critic', p.1, J.C. Reid Papers, MSS & Archives 89/14, Box 22, series 10, Item 93, Special Collections, The University of Auckland Library

⁴⁰ In the late 1930s and early 1940s Mirams was Chairman of the Wellington Branch of the Peace Pledge Union, a British-based pacifist group. Mirams frequently defended its pro-appeasement policies in newspaper columns. See, for example, *Evening Post*, 24 January 1940, p.4, which defends the PPU against accusations of spreading Nazi propaganda. The PPU journal *Peace News* was described by Martin Gilbert as 'an apologist for Nazi Germany', which 'peddled German propaganda as unvarnished fact'. Martin Gilbert, 'Pacifist Attitudes to Nazi Germany, 1936-1945', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.27 No.3, July 1992, p.493

traditional Christian family values.⁴¹ He was also a member of the Inter-Church Council on Public Affairs. In 1947 he went to Paris to work for UNESCO's mass communication division. On his abrupt return to New Zealand after eighteen months he became New Zealand's fourth film censor, holding that post until 1959.⁴²

From 1939 to 1947 Mirams was sub-editor for the *Listener*, then New Zealand's only journal of cultural record. He also contributed 'Speaking Candidly', a weekly column of film reviews, and gave radio talks on cinema.⁴³ According to his contemporary, the filmmaker John O'Shea, Mirams, although 'righteous and boring' and a 'do-gooder', did not share New Zealand intellectuals' derisory attitude towards film at that time. O'Shea considered most of them regarded cinema as 'very down market, you lie down with dogs, you get up with fleas, and if you lay down with films, your mind was obviously a bit addled'.⁴⁴ Mirams, however, was determined to bring film within the domain of respectable intellectual discussion, while also elevating the tone of public discourse on the medium.

In his book *Speaking Candidly*, published late 1945, he demonstrated the impact of American film in shaping New Zealand's social and cultural life in the twentieth century. His argument, however, contained a crucial caveat: American cinema and its influences were essentially frivolous and pernicious. Hollywood cinema was fixated by clichés of plot, imprisoned by its star system, obsessed by money. 'One is tempted to say of Hollywood that "nought enters there, of what validity and pitch soe'r, but falls into abatement and low price even in a minute"'.⁴⁵ His contemporaries observed that Mirams' excoriation of Hollywood film reflected his political bias, which David Ballantyne mocked as 'cozy progressivism'.⁴⁶ Another reviewer commented 'he sees red, and ...is so keen that we should see his big red glasses that he frequently takes them off and flaunts them in front of us. See, he is not so awfully red after all.'⁴⁷ Perhaps this writer had noted the conclusion to Mirams' foreword to *Speaking Candidly*, in which Mirams claimed that his views 'make some people see red. I rather hope they do. It is a pretty good colour'.⁴⁸ *Speaking Candidly*, together with Mirams'

⁴¹ For example, Mirams played a leading role in the 1945 National Council of Church's Christian Order conference. 'Christian Order', *Evening Post*, 28 December 1945, p.3

⁴² Shelton, L.R. 'Mirams, Gordon Holden 1909-1986', *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography* updated 22 June, 2007, <<http://www.dnzb.govt.nz>>, accessed 8 July 2008

⁴³ Shelton, 'Mirams'; J.C. Reid, 'Gordon Mirams as Film Critic', p.p.1-3, J.C. Reid Papers

⁴⁴ John O'Shea, interview, cited in Sigley, 'Film Culture', p. 228

⁴⁵ Mirams, *Speaking Candidly*, p.143

⁴⁶ *Arena [Letters]*, No.12, 1946, p.17. Ballantyne was a Marxist, 'proud of his common man's appreciation of literature'. Richards, *To Bed at Noon*, p.68

⁴⁷ 'N.Z. Bookfellow', *NZ Magazine*, Vol.24, No.6, (Nov-Dec. 1945), p.29

⁴⁸ Mirams, *Speaking Candidly*, p.4

film reviews and other critiques of cinema and its audiences written during 1945-1956, remain an invaluable source for analysing New Zealand responses to American film and American culture. Yet his critique, like so much of Mirams's oeuvre, was hardly original. As one reviewer declared, Mirams' 'most glaring defect as a critic is his rehashing of the work of other writersI doubt if any "critical" work ever relied so heavily on other people's opinions'.⁴⁹

The keepers of the nation's cultural and moral consciences had long condemned American films as pernicious in their impact on susceptible New Zealand audiences. Such detractors attacked them as agents of cultural subversion, infiltrating American linguistic, social and cultural mores into a country which supposedly proclaimed itself to be a British cultural garrison. Mirams' observations about American cinema's implications for New Zealand also echoed the reactions of interwar Leavis-Frankfurt schools of thought about mass media and their dubious artistic merits and deplorable social and cultural consequences. He recycled their key contentions that commercial cinema, especially American cinema, depended on an industrialised process of 'trying to make all films conform to the same standard pattern, and so iron out the individual differences of human beings'.⁵⁰ As proof of this standardisation of cinematic tastes for the masses, Mirams claimed that 'everyone knows Hollywood ... has sought constantly to produce films which appeal simultaneously to typists in London and New York, shop-girls in Paris, artisans in Norway, waterside workers in New Zealand....'⁵¹

Speaking Candidly was in fact a transposition to a New Zealand key of the crucial themes struck in the 1930s with Henry Forman's alarmist *Our Movie Mad Children*, Margaret Thorp's 1939 book *America at the Movies* and Leo Rosten's *Hollywood: the Movie Colony and the Movie Makers*, published in 1941. Like Rosten's work, *Speaking Candidly* combined a sociological grounding with a breezy style.⁵² Mirams also adopted Thorp's focus on the impact of Hollywood films on their audiences' social and cultural behaviour. He followed Thorp in arguing that Hollywood was a crucially influential

⁴⁹ D.W.Ballantyne, *Arena /Letters*, No.12 (1946,) p.17

⁵⁰ Gordon Mirams, 'The Cinema as a Social Influence', *Transactions and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New Zealand*, Vol.77 (1948-9), p.343

⁵¹ Mirams, 'Social Influence', pp.342

⁵² John Sullivan, p.42. In his memoirs Rosten wrote 'I wanted to analyze [Hollywood]...the way an anthropologist might study the Maori'. *The Many Worlds of Leo Rosten*, p.118, cited in John Sullivan, 'Leo C. Rosten's *Hollywood: Power, Status, and the Primacy of Economic and Social Networks in Cultural Production*' in Mayer, Vicki *et al*, eds, *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries* (New York & London: Routledge, 2009), p.45

American social and cultural institution.⁵³ Both included chapters on what Rosten called ‘the long arm of Hollywood’: the various ways in which movies influenced material culture such as hairstyles and clothing fashions, slang and children’s names - ‘an influence that is vast and profound’.⁵⁴ Mirams used these authors’ conclusions, and many of their supporting examples, in his chapter ‘What the Movies Do To Us’. His examples of film-star fashion-setting – Clark Gables’ singlet, Norma Shearer’s and Shirley Temple’s hair, frock styles – are taken from Thorp’s chapter ‘Cinema Fashions’.⁵⁵ He also endorsed Rosten’s condemnation of the superficiality, sentimentality and materialism that Rosten believed characterised much of American cinema.⁵⁶

Thorp and Rosten had both observed that many of era’s ‘movie moguls’, the top studio executives and producers such as Louis Mayer and Harry and Jack Warner, came from humble, foreign, often Jewish origins, ruthlessly building film empires from lowly show business activities originally catering to the uneducated urban poor. Mirams reiterated this feature of contemporary American film-makers with distaste: ‘they emerged originally from vaudeville, “flea-circuses”, petty trade, and “other shabby zones of enterprise”’.⁵⁷ He insisted that these uncouth origins conferred an advantage on those who ran the America film industry – ‘[b]ecause they came from the people and because they lacked refinement and taste, they were able to estimate accurately what the masses of the U.S.A. and other countries wanted at that time in the way of entertainment....’⁵⁸ Unfortunately, Mirams maintained, ‘[i]nvariably their lack of cultural background has had, and continues to have, an effect on the films that Hollywood produces’.⁵⁹

There is one significant feature of his critique of American cinema in *Speaking Candidly* that cannot be found in either Rosten or Thorp.⁶⁰ In Chapter III Mirams spent several paragraphs attacking what he claimed was a hegemonic and unsavoury Jewish influence on Hollywood and its films, although he claimed that he hoped his remarks ‘will not be misunderstood.... I abominate anti-Semitism....’⁶¹ He observed that many Jews held

⁵³ Garth Jowett, *Film: the Democratic Art* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), pp.265-6; Sullivan, ‘Leo C. Rosten’s Hollywood’, pp. 39-53

⁵⁴ Margaret F. Thorp, Chapter IV, *America at the Movies*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939, reprinted New York: Arno Press, 1970) ‘The Literature of Cinema Series) Chapter II, In *Speaking Candidly* Mirams briefly cites Rosten’s work in one paragraph on pp.28-9, although he gives an incorrect title for the book.

⁵⁵ See Thorp, *America at the Movies*, Ch. IV, esp. pp.102-115

⁵⁶ Mirams, *Speaking Candidly*, pp.28-9

⁵⁷ Mirams, *Speaking Candidly*, p.55

⁵⁸ Mirams, *Speaking Candidly*, pp.55-6

⁵⁹ Mirams, *Speaking Candidly*, p.56

⁶⁰ Rosten was Jewish and later wrote a bestseller, *The Joys of Yiddish*.

⁶¹ Mirams, *Speaking Candidly*, p.56; p.59

key positions in Hollywood. This, he declared, explained why 'Hollywood is so lacking in social conscience and social responsibility'. For 'social conscience', according to Mirams,

is a less active force in Jewish culture than in Christian culture. Furthermore, the whole atmosphere of Hollywood - especially its fiercely competitive economic set-up - is such as to bring the worst elements in Jewish culture to the fore.⁶²

In order to support his contentions about Jews and Jewish culture in *Speaking Candidly*, Mirams cited selected quotations from an obscure and anonymous 1937 article, 'An Analysis of Jewish Culture'.⁶³ This maintained that contemporary anti-Semitism was cultural rather than biological or racial in nature. Mirams cited the article's view of Jewish culture in the U.S.A.: a 'culture-within-a-culture', which left its host culture frustrated, sometimes to the point of 'revulsion'.⁶⁴ Mirams' selection from the article was disingenuous. He does not reveal that the section segues into an anti-Semitic diatribe containing statements such as

The Jew wishes to exploit society.... The Jew turns saloon keeper, brothel manager, procurer, bootlegger, gambling joint proprietor, gangster in order to secure money for the enjoyment of his family and himself.⁶⁵

Speaking Candidly was published several months after the New Zealand public heard of the Allied troops' discovery of the death-camps of the Holocaust.⁶⁶ Unsurprisingly, Mirams' claims about Jewish culture proved controversial. His stereotyping of Jews as prurient, avaricious and opportunistic was condemned as utilising the staple themes of Nazi anti-Semitism.⁶⁷ Mirams admitted that his views on Jewish culture as exemplified by Hollywood films had 'provoked a good deal of candid speaking in some quartersthe Jews ... say I am anti-semitic....' But he refused to resile from his views on Jewish culture and Hollywood.

[W]ith references to Jewry ... I stick to my own gunspossibly the simile about guns is not a happy one....although I am not going back on anything I wrote as far as the Jews are concerned I am sorry if I caused them any pain or distress.⁶⁸

⁶² Mirams, *Speaking Candidly*, pp.56 - 58

⁶³ Anonymous, 'An Analysis of Jewish Culture', *International Journal of Ethics*, Vol.46 No.4, July 1937, pp.428-450. The article was allegedly written by a Jew.

⁶⁴ 'Analysis', p.435

⁶⁵ 'Analysis', p.445

⁶⁶ The first official report of the death camps appears to have been conveyed in a report by a New Zealand diplomat, Paddy Costello, stationed in the Moscow legation, to the government in August, 1945. 'The Holocaust: the True Horror', *New Zealand Listener*, 5-11 September 2009, p.30

⁶⁷ e.g. Bertie Heymann, *Speaking Candidly Indeed: An Open Letter to Gordon Mirams* (Wellington: Public Relations Committee of the Council of Wellington Jewry, 1946) unpagged

⁶⁸ Gordon Mirams, 'Afterthought of an Author: Gordon Mirams Replies to his Critics', *National Education*, 1 May, 1946, p.150

Significantly, he made no expression of regret that the publication of his views coincided with the revelation of a genocide that had been predicated on similar racial stereotyping.

IV

Like a number of New Zealand public intellectuals of the time, Mirams distinguished between the preferences of a small but insightful elite, such as members of Film Societies with their focus on largely European and British ‘art’ films, ‘serious-minded picture-goers’,⁶⁹ and the bovine mass of New Zealanders who preferred popular, chiefly American, films. The latter audience Mirams stereotyped as possessing

unsophisticated tastes...[but]large appetites...essentially normal, middle-class and conservative; often going out of sheer habit to the same theatre week after week and often occupying the same seats, regardless of what picture is showing; favouring the orthodox and the conventional in their entertainment, and fighting shy of the bizarre and the exotic, the revolutionary, and even of the experimental....⁷⁰

This public, he claimed, had been narcotised by Hollywood. Such cinema was ‘the biggest dope-racket on earth. We take our weekly doses and float away in a rosy pipe-dream for a few hours....’⁷¹ New Zealand audiences for American films, especially women, were both suggestible and gullible.

When one comes to the field of feminine fashions, Hollywood’s influence is even stronger [than sports] Naturally, fashion-designers and hair-dressers aren’t slow to cash in on this feminine weakness. Every New Zealand town of any size has at least one “Hollywood Frock Shop”. This influence could also be seen in parents’ naming offspring after Hollywood stars, and in emulating Judy Garland and Shirley Temple in their selection of hair-styles and dresses for their daughters.⁷²

Such ‘evidence’, he maintained, ‘substantiate[d] the theory that the cinema in general still caters for a public with the mental age of about 14’.⁷³ His generalisation further demonstrates the willingness of some members of New Zealand cultural elites to infantilise the cinema-going public as part of an on-going effort to belittle that public’s cultural and intellectual abilities. Such a stance also distanced these cultural curates from the unseemly tastes of what Father Ward called “the great unwashed”.

The most striking display of Mirams’ patrician attitude towards popular / Hollywood

⁶⁹ Mirams, *Speaking Candidly*, p.27

⁷⁰ Mirams, *Speaking Candidly*, p.26

⁷¹ Mirams, *Speaking Candidly*, p.39

⁷² Mirams, *Speaking Candidly*, p.31; 32-3

⁷³ Mirams, *Speaking Candidly*, p.36

cinema and its New Zealand audiences is provided by his address in the late 1940s to the conference of the Royal Society of New Zealand. Speaking to people he no doubt considered his intellectual peers, he reiterated his pivotal thesis of *Speaking Candidly*: that popular cinema must ‘taken seriously’ as a crucial social and cultural influence.

I mean, of course, taken seriously by such people as yourselves. There has never been much question about its being taken seriously by those who make money from it, or in another way by the ordinary rank-and-file of filmgoers⁷⁴.

Mirams called on those he considered his intellectual peers to rescue movies from their ‘rank commercialism’. Such was the hold that cinema exerted over the public, that it was incumbent upon this elite to remove it from the hands of those who ‘reduce[d] popular taste to its lowest common denominator’⁷⁵ The movie-going proletariat might be able to gain cultural enrichment with the far-sighted intervention of their intellectual superiors, the ‘well-educated sections’ of their respective national communities. In this way the public could be guided to reject ‘the present general mediocrity of the American film’ and instead watch films of a more educational nature and a more elevated artistic level.⁷⁶ Mirams’ belief that New Zealand filmgoers’ preference for Hollywood movies demonstrated poor intelligence and inferior aesthetic judgement remained a constant in his film criticism. In the first issue of *Landfall*, New Zealand’s postwar journal of high culture, he declared that while the standard of films might have improved slightly,

so much cannot, I think, be said about the standard of popular taste.... one questions whether persons with any pretensions to intelligence are not wasting their time and their indulgence in taking the [popular] movies at all seriously.⁷⁷

It was this very vulgarity of Hollywood films as commodities produced by common but astute ‘salesmen’, whose numbers included ‘foreigners’, which alarmed Mirams, a concern that he usually expressed in the more elevated language of aesthetics, cultural politics and education. In *Speaking Candidly* he complained that although recent elections had demonstrated that New Zealanders favoured ‘a mildly socialist way of life’, the nation was dependent

for the major form of entertainment of the masses of its people (and through it, I would argue, for the predominant educational influence upon them) on an industry in America and

⁷⁴ Mirams, ‘Social Influence’, p.340

⁷⁵ Mirams, ‘Social Influence’, p.341

⁷⁶ Mirams, ‘Social Influence’, pp.342

⁷⁷ Mirams, ‘Peace – it’s wonderful! A survey of the cinema since VJ Day’, *Landfall*, Vol.1, No.1 (March 1947), p.45

Great Britain which believes strongly in the desirability of private enterprise and which flavours much of its product with that belief.⁷⁸

Mirams warned Labour party supporters that their party would not remain long in power unless they succeeded ‘in educating people in the fundamentals of socialism’. How could this be achieved, he asked, ‘when the greatest educational medium in modern life is presenting them, through their entertainment, with a picture of the virtues of rugged individualism?’⁷⁹ Hollywood films such as *Mildred Pierce* portrayed representations of ‘the social and economic attitudes which the Americans in their movies make about no attempt to conceal but none to condemn’.⁸⁰ According to Mirams this American cult of individualism manifested itself in postwar American movies such as *The Big Sleep* and *The Killers*, where it took the form of the ‘gangster outlook’, characterised by ‘exalting the moral and social irresponsibility of the ruthless individualist’. Even Tom and Jerry cartoons now culminated in ‘an orgy of anarchical violence’.⁸¹

The deplorable social consequences of this perceived ethos of American film became a recurring motif in Mirams’ appraisal of that cinema. Like so much of his critique of Hollywood movies, it relied heavily on overseas models. Thus his speech to the Wellington New Education Fellowship on ‘Films in Relation to Children’ and his subsequent article ‘Films and Children’ reiterated the arguments of Rosten, as well as the British critic Roger Manvell’s recent *Film*, with its insistence on the dangerously anti-social messages of cinema. Mirams argued that the values that both critics perceived in Hollywood cinema were ‘invidious and dangerous....’⁸² The seeds of a fascist-capitalist imperative were being broadcast by American cinema as a means of disseminating American values abroad. American films, he argued, were working to ““condition” us to the American way of life and make us receptive to American ideas’. Even ‘the very fact of geography’ was drawing New Zealanders culturally close to the U.S.A.⁸³ For years Hollywood cinema had eroded New Zealanders’ resistance to the viral effects of American cultural values.

[F]our decades of motion-pictures which predominantly have originated in Hollywood have already carried the “Americanisation” of NZ further than most of us realise, and than some of us would care to admit. More than lend-lease, diplomatic agreements, and British-American co-operation movements, the movies have brought these islands, and Australia

⁷⁸ Mirams, *Speaking Candidly*, pp.60-1

⁷⁹ Mirams, *Speaking Candidly*, pp.60-1

⁸⁰ *Listener*, 2 May 1947, p.25 Mirams misrepresents the film -in fact, *Mildred Pierce* does not eulogise capitalist values; it is a noirish condemnation of greed, social-climbing and selfishness in America.

⁸¹ Mirams, ‘Peace - It’s Wonderful!’ p.46

⁸² ‘Films and Children’, *Listener*, 22 June 1945, pp. 6-7

⁸³ Mirams, *Speaking Candidly*, p.125

also, within the orbit of American influence: and that influence ... is not confined merely to clothes, speech, music, and manners; it affects attitudes of mind also.⁸⁴

Mirams' resentment of what he construed as 'Americanisation' was paralleled by his fear that American films had frayed New Zealand's traditional cultural and emotional ties with Britain. Although New Zealanders had not yet become 'as much American as English', he insisted that the balance was tipping in that direction.⁸⁵ The youth, vigour and crudity of American culture, which so appealed to New Zealand's 'masses', would eventually 'predominate over the older, more sophisticated, less robust European cultures'. He concluded his prognosis with the assertion that

If ever a national post-mortem is performed on us, I think they will find there are three words written on New Zealand's heart –ANZAC, HOLLYWOOD, and HOME. But only a very rash prophet would venture to suggest which word would be carved the deepest.⁸⁶

Miles Fairburn praised Mirams' *aperçu* for its insight. In his stimulating essay, 'Is There a Good Case for New Zealand Exceptionalism?' Fairburn noted that Mirams had understood that New Zealand imported its culture from overseas, with American films being a vital source of cultural and social infusion. Consequently New Zealand's culture was what Fairburn called a pastiche of four elements: the Australian, the New Zealand, the American and the British, with the imported by implication possessing overall dominance, but with some uncertainty about which of the imported elements might be the principal one.⁸⁷ According to Fairburn, Mirams had 'stumbled' upon an interesting paradox. He had inferred that New Zealand was unique in that the dominance of Anglo-American-Australian cultural stimuli had stifled the growth of a viable autochthonous culture. Thus New Zealand was exceptional in that its failure to evolve a distinctively local culture was the result of the dominance of other cultures.⁸⁸

Neither Mirams' insight in *Speaking Candidly* that New Zealand's culture was a synthesis, nor his location of this perception within the context of the local reception of American cinema, was original. Both these reflections had been presented for public scrutiny a year before the publication of *Speaking Candidly*. The iconoclastic poet A.R.D. Fairburn published *We New Zealanders: an Informal Essay*, his trenchant critique of

⁸⁴ Mirams, *Speaking Candidly*, pp.122-3

⁸⁵ Mirams, *Speaking Candidly*, pp.124

⁸⁶ Mirams, *Speaking Candidly*, p.344

⁸⁷ Miles Fairburn, 'Is There a Good case for New Zealand Exceptionalism?' in Tony Ballantyne & Brian Montgomery, eds, *Disputed Histories: Imagining New Zealand's Pasts* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2006), p.146

⁸⁸ Miles Fairburn, 'New Zealand Exceptionalism', p.150

the social, cultural, political, and literary state of New Zealand towards the end of World War II.⁸⁹ Expressed with his customary acerbic wit and elegance, and published as a surprisingly popular pamphlet,⁹⁰ *We New Zealanders* was, as Fairburn's friend Terry Bond described it, 'a very nice piece of hand grenade....'⁹¹ The essay's crucial premise was that New Zealanders were 'passive, not active. We are acted upon'. This was a consequence of the tyranny of cultural distance: '[w]e are a long way from anywhere. Nearly everything that happens to us ... originates far away, from causes over which we have no control'.⁹²

Significantly, when the poet provided an example for his contention that '[w]e don't originate our own cultural movements. They are nearly all imported', he specified the 'American film industry' which, he pointed out, 'has had an enormous effect on our morals, manners, and style of living'. However, most New Zealanders were unaware that they were 'the raw material of profits for foreign purveyors of celluloid, and of cosmetics, fashion, and pulp magazines, and radio serials'. Fairburn also recognized that New Zealand's culture was a hybrid culture, a 'half-English (export quality), half-American culture' that New Zealanders mistakenly regarded as autochthonous, 'something we contrived for ourselves'. He concluded that our amalgam of a culture was 'almost entirely the creation of overseas political ideologists, businessmen, artists, poets, inventors, fashion designers and journalists'.⁹³

A.R.D. Fairburn's ideas were therefore firmly established within the public and intellectual domains before *Speaking Candidly* was published. Mirams not only adopted Fairburn's key contention that New Zealand imported its culture, with the U.S.A. being a major source. He also incorporated the poet's identification of our cultural imports as commercial commodities sold by what Fairburn called 'foreign purveyors of celluloid, and of cosmetics, fashion, and pulp magazines, and radio serials', to New Zealand consumers, who constituted the 'raw material' of profit in the cultural market-place.⁹⁴ Fairburn also anticipated Mirams in focusing on cinema as his prime example of such purveyance. '[T]he

⁸⁹ A.R.D. Fairburn, *We New Zealanders: an Informal Essay* (Wellington: Progressive Publishing Society, 1944). The poet was the uncle of Miles Fairburn.

⁹⁰ It sold 2940 copies, an amazing number for a published essay on New Zealand political and social issues. James & Helen McNeish, *Walking on My Feet: A.R.D. Fairburn 1904-1957 A Kind of Biography* (Collins: Auckland, 1983) p.131

⁹¹ Bond to Fairburn, 25 April, 1944, cited McNeish, *Walking on My Feet*, p.118

⁹² Fairburn, *We New Zealanders*, p.5

⁹³ Fairburn, *We New Zealanders*, p.7

⁹⁴ Fairburn, *We New Zealanders*, p.7

film industry is in the hands of a small group of men. It is a narrow and dangerous monopoly. The cinema is mass-entertainment, commercialised to the limit...'⁹⁵

For someone who constantly complained that New Zealand as a repressed and controlling society, Fairburn's solution was surprising.

Our present control over the films is ridiculously inadequate. What we are in need of is a positive policy, one that would not hesitate, if necessary, to ban nine out of ten of the films sent to this country. I see no reason why, as a self-governing community, we should feel bound to admit overseas films if they are not in accordance with our ideas.'⁹⁶

Fairburn justified his stance by arguing that censoring films was different from censoring books, which could be 'left to the moral judgment of individuals'. Like Scott, Fairburn insisted on a hierarchy of aesthetic value, in which 'good' literature was both high art and true culture, entitled to privileges that the low arts of Americanised popular culture, especially films, did not deserve. Movies were 'mass-entertainment, commercialised to the limit, and its power for good or evil is too great for us to be able to ignore'. His solution was both elitist and controlling: state ownership of all cinemas, and film censorship entrusted to a board of 'writers and educationists.... But for God's sake, no political or religious stooges-and no wowsers'.⁹⁷

Unlike Fairburn's essay, which discussed American rather than British films, Mirams differentiated between the two cinemas. In *Speaking Candidly* he commended what he regarded as the wider and deeper geographic and social perspectives of American cinema, in contrast to the restricted 'picture postcard acquaintanceship' and social stereotyping of British cinema. American cinema displayed superior technology, but its actors were inferior to their British counterparts.⁹⁸ His film reviews persistently belittled American movies in comparison with those from Britain. A search of his *Listener* reviews for a few months in 1946 reveals that he accused the thriller *Ministry of Fear* – scripted by Graham Greene from his novel and directed by a German – of having the 'Hollywood touch, the situation dragged out of the pigeonhole'. Yet both *Thunder Rock* and *Dead of the Night*, British versions of the very American crime genre which Mirams would soon condemn, were commended for their

⁹⁵ Fairburn, *We New Zealanders*, p.42

⁹⁶ Fairburn, *We New Zealanders*, p.42

⁹⁷ Fairburn, *We New Zealanders*, p.42 Fairburn's approval of Scott and Mirams' views on politics and religion is unlikely. However, in 1947 he endorsed Scott's condemnation of what Scott regarded as the dangerous effects of 'the heavy downward pressure of our commercialised culture'. Fairburn declared that 'The Culture of today is flattening out into mediocrity all the time'. Review of Scott's *Survey*, *Listener*, 26 December 1947, p.16

⁹⁸ Mirams, *Speaking Candidly*, p.130-132

‘courage and imagination’.⁹⁹ His review of the British melodrama *I’ll Walk Beside You* praised its characters as ‘nice, kind people, conscientious, warm-hearted, and self-sacrificing’, in contrast to the ‘aggressive, acquisitive, violent or downright criminal’ characters to be found in similar American films. For Mirams this was a ‘“typically British” picture; by which I mean that it is completely lacking in the slickness and sophistication’ characteristic of American productions’.¹⁰⁰

Where Mirams did find creditable features in Hollywood films, he frequently claimed that they have been copied from British films. *Boomerang* was commended as marking the ‘beginning of a new fashion in Hollywood picture-making - the application of the documentary method to the domestic thriller and the gangster melodrama. The technique has, of course, been borrowed from many British war-time films....’¹⁰¹ Similarly, *The Story of G.I. Joe*, praised as ‘a masterly example of imaginative realism’, was located within ‘the genre of war films in which the British ...have hitherto been eminent’.¹⁰² Yet the documentary technique of such postwar American films owed much to *American*, not British, sources such as the 1930’s documentary *The Plough That Broke the Plains*, the Pacific war documentaries of the great American director John Ford (*They Were Expendable*, *Battle of Midway*) and Frank Capra’s famous documentary series *Why We Fight*.¹⁰³

By 1947 *Listener* readers were increasingly complaining that Mirams’ reviews and articles were politically biased, out of touch with contemporary trends in cinema and above all, obsessively anti-American. One indignant letter characterised Mirams’ opinions as ‘the vapourings of a being with a furred tongue, a bad livery gout in one foot, and a man-sized corn on the other’;¹⁰⁴ another deplored his ‘resentful, vicious and bitter spirit towards the Americans’ and contrasted his ‘below-the-belt digs at American films’ with the ‘undying eulogy he bestows on the poorest of British films’.¹⁰⁵ Even the *People’s Voice* commented

⁹⁹ *Listener*, 1 February 1946, p.19; 22 February 1946, p.15; 16 August 1946, pp.14-15

¹⁰⁰ *Listener*, 6 April 1945, p.16 Mirams’ Wellington Film Society colleague, John O’Shea, also established a Hollywood / Pinewood polarity. In 1948 O’Shea argued that American cinema was based on ‘commercial success’, whereas British films has a ‘reputation for artistic film production’. *Wellington Film Society Bulletin*, 1 April, 1948, p.2

¹⁰¹ *Listener*, 6 June 1947, p.7

¹⁰² *Listener*, 1 November 1946, p. 17

¹⁰³ Peter Rollins, ‘Frank Capra’s *Why We Fight* film series and our American dream’, *Journal of American Culture*, Vol.19, No. 4, pp. 81-7. Capra’s model for his treatment of actuality footage was, ironically, the German director’s 1935 pro-Nazi documentary *Triumph of the Will*, especially its manipulation of sound and image. Rollins, ‘Frank Capra’, p. 82

¹⁰⁴ *Listener*, 21 February 1947, p.5

¹⁰⁵ *Listener*, 23 November 1945, p.5; 26 October 1945, p.6

that ‘for Mr. G. Mirams’ benefit let it not be said that the rubbishy films are not all American’.¹⁰⁶ Although Mirams dismissed the ‘completely erroneous impression that I have an anti-American bias’, attacks on his perceived cultural and political biases culminated in July 1947, with the publication of a letter from ‘Let’s Be Honest’. Its author condemned Mirams’ recent critique of Walt Disney’s *Make Mine Music*. Mirams had scorned its ‘hot music, its sugary sentiment, its cheap chocolate-box pretty-pretty-ness’. The pseudonymous attack on Mirams’ bias against American films succinctly identified many of the *Listener* critic’s prejudices against that nation’s cinema:

One does not need to have any “axes to grind” to see that many American films are often better than other imports. It is nothing but snobbishness and affectation to favour foreign pictures. Another kind of affectation is the mania for English pictures; no matter how gauche, lurid, trashy these may be, they are invariably hailed with exaggerated fuss. Without doubt, many of them are frightfully poor. People must learn to be sensible about movie art; a film is not necessarily meretricious because it’s from Hollywood, or inevitably artistic and brilliant (and cultural) because it’s from Paris or London.... Critics are fond of harping on the bad influence of American films. I would like to know what kind of influence in the moral way they think British films exude: the majority produced between 1945 and 1947 were on themes of rape, adultery, sadism, debauchery and murder.¹⁰⁷

Soon after this letter appeared Mirams announced that he was leaving the *Listener* to take up an appointment in UNESCO’s mass communications office in Paris.¹⁰⁸ When he returned to New Zealand in 1949, it was to become the new film censor and register of films, a job he held until 1959. He used these posts to extend and amend the system of issuing films restricted certificates that permitted them to be shown to specific audiences, usually classified by age. In *Speaking Candidly* Mirams claimed he opposed the existing ‘negative form of film censorship.... insisting that ‘what is really needed is not censorship but guidance’.¹⁰⁹ Although he implemented a system of age restrictive certificates (R16 etc),

¹⁰⁶ *People’s Voice*, 17 April, 1946, p.4

¹⁰⁷ *Listener*, 18 July, 1947, p.5

¹⁰⁸ In a November 1947 *Listener* article, ‘Reds Under the Beds’, he praised pro-Russian films of the second world war, complained that Hollywood’s ‘magnifying-glass qualities’ meant it was incapable of ‘getting things into perspective and into proportion’ and denounced the current American ‘Red-scare’ about communist influence in Hollywood. Finally, he concluded ‘having written this, I shall now probably be unpopular with everybody – except, perhaps, with a few liberals, who don’t cut much ice these days, anyway’. Mirams. ‘Reds Under the Beds’, *Listener*, 7 November 1947, pp. 13-15

¹⁰⁹ Mirams, *Speaking Candidly*, p. 63; 67 Yet a few paragraphs later he suggested that ‘although I am against censorship in principle’, it could be justified in the recent case – ‘at the very time that the American-serviceman-New Zealand-girl problem was causing concern’ – of the film *Iceland*. This American musical-romance was, in Mirams’ view, a worthy candidate for bowdlerization because it depicted a local girl rejecting her plodding Icelandic boyfriend in favour of the film’s dashing Marine hero. He failed to note that the film’s sub-plot involved the Marine gradually realizing the need for Americans to show sensitivity to overseas cultural and social customs.

in his decade as censor he not only banned films, but also cut films to which he granted restricted release.¹¹⁰

Miram's therefore flouted the rationale behind his classification system: that it would prevent children and youths from seeing films deemed inappropriate for their age and sensibilities, but would enable adult New Zealanders to watch them in their original form.¹¹¹ He claimed that he was replacing a system based on suppression with one based on guidance.¹¹² His censorship decisions however, revealed an increasingly controversial willingness to cut or ban films – usually American – whose social or political content he found unacceptable. Even when he did not ban American films whose political content he found objectionable, he made his disapproval public. When a reviewer suggested that the 1953 film *Red Planet Mars*¹¹³ contained a 'very much praiseworthy concept', Miram's acridly informed the publication's editor that

If this film provides an example of good intentions, I should like to know what in the name of Hell's pavements provides a bad one. Its primary purpose is to make money at the box-office. But to do this it exploits sentiments of religious hysteria, political and racial prejudice, American jingoism and crude wishful thinking To many sincere Christians, parts of this film must seem to verge on blasphemy.¹¹⁴

Miram's overriding justification for such attitudes relied on what he regarded as the deleterious social impact of films on audiences. He continued to argue publicly that films influenced social behaviour. He made front-page news with his attendance at public screenings of *The Man in the Dark*, the first 3-D film shown in New Zealand and to which he had given an A (Adults-Only) certificate, in order to ascertain if 'what may be acceptable on the flat screen may be highly objectionable in 3-D'.¹¹⁵ In 1954, as well as banning the American films *I, the Jury* and *Prisoner of War*, decisions which were overturned on appeal, Miram's also rejected *The Wild One*, which featured disaffected young Americans in the guise of motorbike gangs and starred Marlon Brando. He also banned the film in 1955 and

¹¹⁰ As an example of the type of excision he made to films granted a restricted rating, Miram's cut the phrase 'You ain't pregnant' from *Born Yesterday* in 1951. Miram's to the Manager, Columbia Pictures, Auckland, 22 Nov. 1951, Film Censor's Office IA 83 15, ANZ

¹¹¹ A more detailed version of this classification system was introduced in 1956. 'The New Film Censorship Regulations', *Education* Vol.6, No.1, Feb.1957 in 'The New Film Regulations', < <http://www.censorship.govt.nz/PDFWORD/new-regulations.pdf>>; Shelton, 'Miram's', accessed 10 July 2008

¹¹² Miram's, 'The New Film Censorship Regulations'

¹¹³ *Red Planet Mars*, the object of Miram's wrath, defies coherent summation. Its plot, which reads like a deranged collaboration between Thomas Pynchon and Quentin Tarantino, concerns a Russian communist plot to delude inhabitants of Earth into believing that God is sending radio messages to them from Mars.

¹¹⁴ *Monthly Bulletin*, Wellington Film Society, September 1953, p.5 It was indicative of Miram's influence that the *Bulletin*'s editor promised him that the reviewer would in future 'watch his words more often' and that the writer admitted that his 'faint praise' of the film 'wasn't really as faint as the film warranted'. *Bulletin*, September 1953, p.6

¹¹⁵ *Christchurch Star-Sun*, 16 April 1953, p.1

1959. In both 1955 and 1956 he banned *Rebel Without a Cause*, widely regarded both then and now as a thoughtful, well-acted, meticulously directed film examining family and generational tensions and youthful delinquency within an affluent American context.¹¹⁶ Perhaps Mirams was disturbed by the film's portrayal of American middle-class teenagers dressed in working-class style, wearing jeans and leather jackets, fighting with knives and driving dangerously.¹¹⁷ By the mid-fifties Mirams increasing paranoia about the social and moral content of Hollywood resulted in his cutting sequences from Disney movies and Broadway musicals. A giant squid's attack on a submarine was excised from *20 000 Leagues Under the Sea*; two songs were removed from the anodyne *Brigadoon* because they were deemed suggestive.¹¹⁸

V

Other critics of American films at this time focused on what they saw as their commodification. The *National Review* for example, routinely condemned their assembly-line production values, described as the product of 'Hollywood conferences wherein the commercial minds examine the market and decide what can be concocted to satisfy it. Considerations of good taste are tabu'.¹¹⁹ Hollywood's output was essentially formulaic imitations of box-office successes. Like most industrial processes, its films were 'ruthlessly fashioned into the proven commercial mould'.¹²⁰

A more comprehensive indictment of American cinema was made in another *National Review* article, 'What have We Learned By "Going to the Pictures"?' A fusillade of sarcastic rhetorical questions swiftly established the writer's response to American films. 'Has Hollywood, Mecca of millions enriched us in her time? In titillating the senses, has she failed to deed the mind?'¹²¹ The author also condemned New Zealanders' regular trips to such films as 'flat, stale and unprofitable'. In an especially revealing declaration, (s)he

¹¹⁶ 'Rebel Without a Cause', < <http://www.censor.org.nz/history-of-censorship-/index.html#date-1943>, > accessed 10 July 2008. Mirams' ban on this film was also overturned on appeal.

¹¹⁷ Uta Poiger argues that many West Germans were concerned by the example provided by the working-class motifs emulated by youths from middle-class that is a feature of the film. Uta Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 81

¹¹⁸ Peter J. Read, 'Blue Suede Gumboots: the Impact of Imported Popular Culture on New Zealand in the 1950s' (M.A. Thesis, University of Otago, 1990), p.33; 47

¹¹⁹ *New Zealand National Review*, 15 April 1949, p. 89

¹²⁰ *New Zealand National Review*, 15 April 1949, p. 91; 15 June 1949, p.87

¹²¹ 'What Have We learned by "Going to the Pictures"?', *New Zealand National Review*, 13 September 1947, p.24

stereotyped the audiences for such cinema as ‘simple, unsophisticated people. The sight of strange events, places and ways of living, shown as a background of highly-dramatised plots, is bound to arouse strong reactions in the minds of the young, the defective and the primitive’.¹²² Here is another example of that familiar trope: the infantilisation and disparagement of the mental and emotional capacities of the New Zealand film-going public who enjoyed Hollywood cinema. It is part of a series of patronising discourses about New Zealand audiences and consumers of American culture by local cultural and civic arbiters.¹²³ On the one hand they portrayed these audiences as mindlessly and passively unresisting receptors of American cultural input; on the other, they were represented as aggressively hyperactive responders to such cultural adrenalin. For such critics, Hollywood cinema, like other forms of American popular culture, was at once narcotic and stimulant, and its receivers were somehow simultaneously rendered both soporific and intoxicated by that culture.¹²⁴

Unfavourable New Zealand responses to American movies during the 1944-49 period frequently emulated Mirams by unfavourably comparing Hollywood films with British cinema, the latter lauded as artistically and morally superior. Whereas Hollywood films were, according to the author of “Going to the Pictures”, ‘artificial and even unwholesome’, British cinema was

characterized by a realism and wholesomeness that is much to its credit. In British films there is somehow a sense of “feet on the ground”. Plots are realistic. They deal with life as it is, and, happily for too impressionable minds, are not obsessed with the sordid and the exotic. Moreover, the fine English voices are a distinct pleasure.¹²⁵

Similar praise of English cinema was attested by figures in educational, cultural and political elites during 1945–1949. In 1948 a Canterbury University College petition claimed

¹²² ‘What Have We Learned’, p.24

¹²³ Two years earlier a newspaper reported that in response to the National M.P. Hilda Ross’s complaint about the ‘type of picture’ being shown, the Labour M.P. J.Thorne had interjected ‘It is the people’s tastes that are wrong’. *NZ Herald*, 22 September 1945, p.6. Nine years later the *New Zealand Libraries* suggested that teenagers could have their ‘undesirable film influences’ modified by having film societies show them documentary films about rice growing in Thailand and beavers in Russia. ‘The School and Film Appreciation’, *New Zealand Libraries*, 1 December 1954, p.392

¹²⁴ Occasionally a member of these elites would warn his fellows of the dangers of such cultural condescension. R.M.Macfarlane, the mayor of Christchurch and also Labour M.P for Christchurch Central, advised that ‘[o]ne cannot afford to become too highbrow. If one gets above the proletariat’s idea of amusement, or if one is inclined to become a little too high highbrow, then one cannot know exactly what is in the public mind’. NZPD, Vol. 287, (1949), p.2041

¹²⁵ ‘What Have We Learned’, p.21. G.Nowell-Smith argues that Hollywood’s ‘enormous and unchallenged strength’ has always been that it the best ‘fabricator of fantasy’. He suggests that some British / European film-makers opted instead for ‘realism’, which was cheaper, rooted in European cultural traditions, and offered a ‘national-cultural distinctiveness’. G. Nowell-Smith, ‘Introduction’ in Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, & Steven Ricci, eds, *Hollywood and Europe: Economics, Culture, National Identity 1945-95* (London: British Film Institute, 1998), pp.12-13

that ‘British films in the past ten years have seriously and maturely tackled problems that Hollywood has always shied at’.¹²⁶ Jack Somerville on behalf of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand informed a 1949 parliamentary committee that ‘Church people prefer British pictures because they are more in line with our British way of life and illustrate the standards of our society’. According to the results of a questionnaire circulated by the Church, a majority of respondents agreed that ‘New Zealand picture theatres should be in the hands of British Nationals’. Somerville claimed these Presbyterians believed that ‘the British way of life should be displayed on the New Zealand screen’. He insisted that ‘Hollywood is completely out of touch with the life of ordinary mortals as lived in British countries’, and that one of its worst features was its faulty conception of family and morals’.¹²⁷

Local perceptions about the allegedly superior ‘British’ qualities of that nation’s cinema during the forties and early fifties must be considered within the context of international cinema production of that era. Late 1940s British crime films, lauded by Mirams for their gritty and uncompromising realism, were indebted to another, more recent, Hollywood cinematic model: the *film noir*. Yet as we have seen, Mirams and others usually condemned that genre, with its grim depictions of people trapped in the interstices between crime and justice, and revenge and betrayal, that supposedly most British of cinematic virtues, its uncompromising realism.

Ironically, many of America’s leading directors, producers and technical staff originally came from England, Europe and its film studios.¹²⁸ And many of the filmmakers in the U.K. who made the movies praised by Mirams and others for their supposedly distinctive British qualities were in fact from Europe, especially Germany. The British film industry of this era was, like Hollywood, a ‘major centre for émigré film-makers fleeing Nazi persecution’, with a consequent impact on ‘the aesthetic and technical standards of the

¹²⁶ ‘Amber and Old Lace’, *Canta*, 15 September 1948, p.5 The petition protested against the censor’s recent decision to ban the film version of *Brighton Rock*.

¹²⁷ Statement by J.S. Somerville, Convenor of the Public Questions Committee of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, Item # 28, to Motion Pictures Industry Committee, undated, Box 1 Part 1 IC1 1207 27/1/1, p.1, ANZ; Statement submitted to Motion Pictures Industry Committee #28, by the Public Questions Committee of the Presbyterian Church of NZ presented by Convenor Rev J.S. Somerville, pp.1-3. Somerville provided a statement by ‘family group’: ‘We are strongly in favour of British films as setting forth a way of life that is not too different from ours.’ The headmaster of St. Heliers Bay School praised ‘good English films’ and regretted that ‘unfortunately so many are American. After all, we do not want our children to develop into little Yanks’. His school’s committee then resolved to demand the government exercise ‘stricter censorship and control’ of films, comics and radio, those key conveyors of American popular culture. *NZ Herald*, 11 April 1946, p.8

¹²⁸ Many of the severest critics of Hollywood films and American mass culture also came from Europe, especially the key members of the Frankfurt school, Adorno and Horkheimer.

“British” films they worked on’.¹²⁹ These filmmakers, as Andrew Higson has demonstrated, had a pervasive influence on British film culture and film-making.¹³⁰ Furthermore, during the British financial crises of the immediate postwar decade, a series of Anglo-American film agreements encouraged American studios to produce films in England. Classified as ‘British’ productions, they were in effect the cinematic offspring of American studios.¹³¹

They Made Me a Fugitive, one of the best immediate postwar British films, provides a revealing example of the transnational mobility of cinema and its capacity to transcend the frontiers of language and national culture during this era.¹³² It relied on the ‘hardboiled’ conventions of American pulp fiction, employed the cynical tone and downbeat ending of the *film noir*, was directed by a Brazilian, made by a company jointly owned by the American RKO Studio and the British Rank Organisation, shot by a refugee Czechoslovakian cinematographer and used American slang in its advertising—‘The whole town’s sizzling! If you can take it tough, here’s your show!’¹³³ The Associated British Picture Corporation provides another example. One of the two most powerful organisations in the British film industry during the 1939-1959 era, this studio’s output was rigorously based on Hollywood production values. Its distinctive leitmotif of the imperilled stranger or outsider in England bore the imprint of its powerful and controlling scenario editor, Frederick Gotfurt, who was the company’s ‘dramaturgical gatekeeper’ and his producer, Viktor Skutetsky. Both were German émigrés, and both, in Porter’s words, outsiders ‘to English life and English institutions’.¹³⁴ In other words, much British cinema of this era was hardly the purely ‘English’ cinema whose qualities were praised by Mirams and others, and contrasted with the allegedly inferior American product. Instead, it was a hybrid cinema,

¹²⁹ Andrew Higson, ‘The Instability of the National’, in Justine Ashby, and Andrew Higson, eds, Andrew, *British Cinema, Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.42

¹³⁰ Andrew Higson, ‘Instability’, p.42

¹³¹ For example, the British Picture Corporation, one the ‘big two’ British production companies, was 37.5% owned by Warner Bros. Sarah Street, ‘The British Picture Corporation, 1949-1958’ in Ashby, Justine & Higson, eds, Andrew, *British Cinema, Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.152; Street, ‘Stepping Westward: the Distribution of British Feature Films in America and the case of *The Private Life of Henry VIII*’ in *British Cinema, Past and Present*

¹³² Higson’s article provides an interesting discussion of what he calls ‘The Instability of the National’ in cinema.

¹³³ Booklet, unpagged, for *They Made Me a Fugitive*, Director: Alberto Calvacanti (DVD: Best of British Collection ODNF115 Odeon Entertainment, 2009) Text by Prof. Steve Chibnall

¹³⁴ As scenario editor, and with the support of the ABPC’s chief Robert Clark, Gotfurt was often accused of exercising a ‘kid-glove dictatorship’ in his work with the creative triumvirate of director, producer and writer, Vincent Porter, “Outsiders in England: the films of the Associated British Picture Corporation, 1949-1958” in Ashby, Justine & Higson, eds, Andrew, *British Cinema, Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.155-196; p.158

frequently depending on the expertise of people from non-English backgrounds – including America.

VI

The frontiers of national culture and identity, according to Richard Maltby, are policed by the institutions of censorship and criticism.¹³⁵ The three public intellectuals whose views on American film and culture dominate this chapter, W.J. Scott, Gordon Mirams and A.R.D. Fairburn, patrolled these boundaries. For all three, censorship was a means of ensuring that the effects of Hollywood films were socially and culturally constrained within limits prescribed by the cultural elite. For Fairburn and Mirams, film criticism was also a means of containment. By delineating most American cinema as at best frivolous and at worst pernicious, both perpetuated the elitist *schema* whereby American films were differentiated from ‘high’ culture films: continental and some British cinema. The pair shared Scott’s hope that education would indoctrinate New Zealanders, especially youth, into an appreciation of ‘good’ cinema and guide them away from the false values of Hollywood. All three believed that dual regimes of censorship and enculturation were necessary to defend the nation from the forces of American cultural imperialism, of which Hollywood cinema was the most insidiously dangerous.

At another level, this triumvirate shared socio-cultural perspectives with earlier critics of American cinema such as Truby King. As the most popular, most ubiquitous and possibly the most inclusive expression of American culture, cinema was perceived as especially threatening by western cultural elites for it challenged hierarchies of discrimination of discrimination, taste and class.¹³⁶ New Zealand public intellectuals like Mirams, Scott and Fairburn played a vital mediating role in what John Frow calls the ‘production and circulation of cultural value’.¹³⁷ Indeed, at times they seem to have stepped from the vignettes that enliven Pierre Bourdieu’s discussion of the bourgeois cultural mentality in *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*.

For Bourdieu, of course, stances on culture were assertions of class and status distinction. The reactions of some of New Zealand’s elites to American cinema, and

¹³⁵ Richard Maltby, ‘“D” For Disgusting: American Culture and English Criticism’ in Nowell-Smith & Ricci, *Hollywood and Europe*, p.106

¹³⁶ Maltby, ‘D’ for Disgusting’, p.106

¹³⁷ John Frow, *Cultural Studies and Cultural Values* (Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.3

American culture, are a declaration of cultural independence from the uncouth, less intelligent empire of New Zealanders that constituted the local cinema audience and which preferred Hollywood fare. Their insistence on enforcing, by education and censorship, a distinction between 'good' and 'vulgar' taste in matters cinematic was not only an attempt to impose their own high bourgeois values and tastes on the majority of New Zealanders they regarded as aesthetically deprived. For Scott and Mirams, at least, it also appears to be an attempt to differentiate themselves from those cultural unfortunates below them in New Zealand's educative-social hierarchy.

As Sarah Smith has pointed out, it was crucially significant that cinema in the first half of the twentieth century became a 'cheap and massively-attended source of entertainment, rather than improvement'. Not only was it tainted in its early days in America and Britain as a medium especially popular with the urban working classes. It was also disdained as a medium controlled by commercial interests, chiefly American after 1914, rather than by religious, educational or 'improving' ones. Moral entrepreneurs represented cinema as a threat to society and morality.¹³⁸ Consequently, the prevalent discourses within New Zealand on American film during the three decades that followed World War I fell into two major categories. The first was grounded in political and ideological arguments about the inherently inferior aesthetics of American cinema. The second arose from claims that Hollywood cinema was pernicious and socially irresponsible, endangering the uneducated and vulnerable. Those susceptible groups included not only the impressionable young, but also those adults deemed to be lacking necessary intellectual, educational and cultural resources and so requiring the guidance and control of those more generously endowed with these attributes. But in the decade that followed the end of the Pacific war, these attitudes, hitherto treated as dogma by many of the nation's educationally privileged, were increasingly challenged from within the ranks of that group.

¹³⁸ Sarah Smith, *Cinema, Children and Censorship: From Dracula to the Dead End Kids*, (London: I.B.Tauris, 2005), p.6

CHAPTER EIGHT

Changing Attitudes Towards Hollywood Movies, 1947-1956

I

In 1953 *Landfall* published one of its rare articles on cinema. Titled ‘The Celluloid Jungle’, it was written by P.J. Downey, who would become prominent amongst the legal, administrative and cultural elites during the next four decades. Downey condemned the spate of recent American movies like *Sunset Boulevard* that cast a trenchant and cynical eye over Hollywood itself.

And now for the amusement, if not the edification of the world at large, Hollywood has stretched itself out on a couch and vomited forth the festering mass of selfish materialism that has given itself one of the most frightening collective psychoses that has ever been developed. Hollywood is synonymous with heaven or hell depending on your mental age, emotional maturity, moral standards, and political preferences.¹

He reiterated the tropes that constituted the conventional elitist critique of Hollywood movies during the 1940s. Its films, or ‘product’ in his vocabulary, were salacious and dangerous.² They represented the noisome outflow of an acquisitive economic system. Downey adopted a distinctively Manichean attitude towards American cinema, insisting that Hollywood could elicit only two responses: Hollywood was either heaven or it was hell. The ‘correct’ response not only indicated the depth of one’s intellectual and political condition. It also signified superior aesthetic tastes not shared by the mass of moviegoers. Downey made it clear that only a small elect of New Zealanders possessed the requisite attitude towards Hollywood. His invective against Hollywood appeared at a time when the intellectual reception of American cinema in New Zealand was in a state of flux. Mirams’ departure from the *Listener* temporarily removed a powerful critic of Hollywood cinema. Yet accusations that American cinema embodied pernicious American cultural imperialism became more prevalent, coinciding with the increasing international tensions associated with the Cold War, the rise of McCarthyism, and the outbreak of the Korean war, with their consequent repercussions on the New Zealand political scene. The realignment of New

¹ P.J. Downey, ‘The Celluloid Jungle’, *Landfall*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (December 1953), p. 282

² Downey, ‘Celluloid Jungle’, p. 284

Zealand's defence and strategic postures away from their traditional reliance on Britain and towards the U.S.A. also provided a fresh context for the old debate over the respective merits of British and American films.

In this chapter I argue that during this period several New Zealand intellectuals adopted new, less political and more inclusive attitudes towards Hollywood and its movies. They displayed an increased willingness to recognise the ability of Hollywood moviemakers to evade, exploit and even subvert the requirements of their studio regimes. This new approach emphasised the subtle ways in which postwar American filmmakers adapted and revitalised traditional Hollywood movie genres such as crime films and westerns. No longer did these critics focus on the perceived social and ideological merits or flaws of American movies. Nor were they obsessed by the allegedly pernicious influences of Hollywood. This new wave of New Zealand film criticism argued that some American films were powerful, occasionally radical, critiques of the postwar American political and social scenes. A crucial figure in this critical turn was J.C. Reid, a prominent Auckland academic. His evolving outlook on American cinema from the late forties to the mid-fifties exemplified this fresh perspective.

II

In 1947 *Landfall* published an article by J.G.A. Pocock, then a young Christchurch academic. His analysis of recent films revealed the new attitudes to Hollywood cinema now emerging within postwar New Zealand. Pocock suggested that New Zealand was so remote from the centres of film production, there was a 'time lag' in distribution which meant that local viewers saw a film some considerable time after its original release. Consequently, because film was 'the most contemporary, in every way the most urgent of the arts', their knowledge of current filmmaking trends was necessarily limited and subjective. He hoped this situation

may encourage the growth of an individual (and therefore a native) way of thinking about the cinema, one rooted in our own conditions of living, our local interests and prejudices, imposed on us not by the jelly-mould of publicity nor by the necessity of keeping up with the latest intellectual fashion.³

Our local responses to cinema, then, might arise undistorted by the ideological perspectives of Marxists, the Frankfurt school and the Leavisites.

³ 'Commentaries J.G.A. Pocock: Recent Films', *Landfall*, Vol. 1, No.4, December 1947, p.295

Pocock discussed five films he had recently viewed in Christchurch: one British, two European and two American.⁴ Unlike Mirams, he had little interest in evaluating these films in terms of their social messages and effects. He also made no presumption of a divergence in cultural standards between the European 'art' film and the American popular film. Instead, Pocock considered all five capable of illustrating a fundamental epistemological issue of cinema: what constituted 'realism' in film?

Each has, as any film of quality must have, some bearing on the nature and central problems of the film as an art. That problem has been defined ... as 'the creative treatment of actuality'; and the problems are those of the relations which may exist between the camera and the 'actuality' of its subject.⁵

Pocock assumed that the two Hollywood films were valid art forms for discussing aesthetic issues of cinema. Much of his article discussed how these two archetypical American genre films transcended the parameters of cinematic realism. *Boomerang* was 'realistic' on one level:

the characters had real motives and feelings, and expressed them with integrity; there was maturity and intelligence in every scene, and the story was with these qualities, not against them. The community itself became real with a matter-of-fact physical immediacy.⁶

However, *Boomerang*'s cinematic use of fictional elements enabled it to surpass mere documentary realism by its embodiment of mythical aspects of American folklore:

the frontier issue of law against lawlessness...the success story... the worship of ordinariness....An American director has selected a story drawn from "actuality" and treated it with entire honesty and accuracy, and ... it has become a version of the universal American legend.⁷

Pocock demonstrated how the director John Ford, by abjuring documentary realism in *My Darling Clementine* and by approaching the frontier west - which the young critic felicitously called 'the heartland of American myth' - in a completely stylised manner, achieved another type of 'reality', one resonant with allegorical meaning. He insisted that 'realism' in the hands of Ford was much more than the politicised 'social realism' that drew the praise of critics like Mirams.

⁴ The British film was *Great Expectations*; *The Last Chance* was Swiss, and *Olympia* was German. The two American films were *Boomerang* and *My Darling Clementine*.

⁵ 'Commentaries J.G.A. Pocock', p.295

⁶ 'Commentaries J.G.A. Pocock', p.298

⁷ 'Commentaries J.G.A. Pocock', p.298

In his films ...myth and reality become one: the Okies and the poor whites move to a sound track of American ballad music, and the photography, relying on harsh daylight and the heavy light of lamps, elevates realistic blacks and whites to a level of poetry which is that of the ballad singers. Ford's world is a folk-song world; immediate social issues, the Ishmael sailors of O'Neill...the eponymous heroes of the West, inhabit the same country of legend. Without sacrificing their reality, he brings horses, donkey-engines and jalopies into a light which is not the light of ordinary realism.⁸

Illuminated by such radiance, Ford provided audiences with visions offering revelatory insights into the nature of America itself, and glimpses of an understanding of the more universal human condition. According to Pocock, Ford, by exploring and transcending the spacious territory of the American West, had travelled into the more extensive realm of mythology.

Pocock also inverted the familiar comparison of American and British films. Instead of maintaining that British film was more 'realistic' than its glamorous Hollywood counterpart, and therefore, its superior, he argued that British cinema was now *less* realistic than Hollywood. It had yet to produce a film as grounded in realism as *Boomerang*, for example. Furthermore, British film, unfortunately dominated by its 'theatrical tradition', lacked what Pocock called 'the American "feeling of essential cinema"... the knowledge that the story was conceived and presented as a cinema story, not as a story turned into cinema'.⁹ In other words, he insisted that American, not British cinema, provided the uniquely cinematic experience.

This acceptance of Hollywood films as having aesthetic value, along with Pocock's indifference to those films' commercial parentage and his refusal to regard social and political commentary as the yardstick for measuring their cinematic merit, set a new paradigm for postwar reception of American cinema in New Zealand. His insistence that the American genres of crime films and westerns were not only sources of penetrating social and political comment, but also functioned as evocative myth, anticipated 1950s French critical responses to Hollywood cinema. Significantly, Pocock's praise of the superior *cinematic* qualities of contemporary American films compared with those from the United Kingdom suggested that the usual New Zealand critical binary of superior British / inferior Hollywood was being reappraised. Yet Pocock had little respect for the ability of the public to appreciate cinematic or other arts. All the public sought was 'mere enjoyment, gained gregariously with the minimum of mental exertion'. Unlike Scott or Mirams, Pocock refused to accept that the cultural elite should try to impose their values on the public. '[T]he mass-

⁸ 'Commentaries J.G.A. Pocock', p.298

⁹ 'Commentaries J.G.A. Pocock', p.299

man sees nothing but an unprovoked and malicious attempt to rob him of his pleasures; and his reaction may well resemble that of a hog roused from his mudhole'.¹⁰ This contempt of some of the intelligentsia for the public's cultural judgements carried over into the 1950s. In 1952, *Canta*'s film reviewer expressed amazement that *Limelight*, 'with its philosophical content and underlying seriousness' was so popular with local audiences. Usually, the reviewer remarked, 'when a picture is worth seeing ... primitive people ... don't come'.¹¹

The Auckland academic and literary figure M.K. Joseph followed Pocock, not in denigrating the public's aesthetic wisdom, but in championing the aesthetic merit of some American cinema. He also condemned the affectation of some European 'art' films. In a 1949 article appropriately titled 'Down With the Arty Film', he included two popular American genres alongside two celebrated figures of European art cinema, praising the 'merits of the unpretentious: the gangster, the western, the artless art of Pagnol, the realism of Rossellini'. For Joseph, 'Ford is already among the classics', although occasionally 'misled by "film-society values"'.¹² In another article Joseph praised American gangster movies, maintaining that films like *Scarface* and *Little Caesar* constituted

the first distinctive contribution to the art of the sound-film. They restored speed and movement to a cinema apparently petrified by the advent of sound. Raucous and violent, they had considerable dramatic impact.

He also observed that the forties film-noir genre were 'high-grade thrillers.... Sexy, sophisticated and slick as a whistle.... by Hollywood standards they carried a heavy sociological punch'. For all their grittiness and spasms of violent action, they still had contained a moral and social comment, a dystopian view of America— '[a]n acrid criticism of a world animated by greed for money was implied, if not stated', a depiction of a society 'gone rotten on the inside'.¹³ Roger Robinson noted that Joseph's later literary work utilised elements of popular culture, combining 'intellectual with populist elements'.¹⁴ His unfortunately few articles on cinema reveal that this coalescence also characterised his approach to Hollywood film.

Both Joseph and Pocock deserve recognition for their anticipation, or at the very least, their prescient acknowledgment, of crucial themes in the seminal film criticism that

¹⁰ *Listener*, 27 June 1947, p.18

¹¹ 'Limelight', *Canta*, 26 March, 1953, p.5

¹² M.K. Joseph, 'Down With the Arty Film', *Here & Now*, October 1949, p.29

¹³ M.K. Joseph, 'How Black Was My Movie?', *Here & Now*, November 1949, pp.26-7

¹⁴ Roger Robinson, 'Joseph, M.K.' in Roger Robinson and Nelson Wattie, eds, *The Oxford Companion to New Zealand Literature*, <<http://www.oxfordreference.com.ezproxy.canterbury.ac.nz/views/>>, accessed 13 November 2009

was to emerge in France and Britain in the late forties and the U.S.A. in the sixties. Both men treated American film with an intellectual respect that was, for its time, innovative and even daring in the context of international film criticism. In Britain, the film journal *Sequence* was, by the decade's end, paying serious attention to Hollywood films. Its editor, Lindsay Anderson, declared that

By the end of the War, British films were respectable and overpraised... Why should we join in the chorus of praise? It was much more useful, surely, to draw attention to the vision and vitality of American cinema – then much despised.¹⁵

This was exactly what Pocock and Joseph were doing in 1947 and 1949 respectively: emphasising that Hollywood, for all its faults, was capable of bringing energy and ideas to cinema. This was also the message of the new French film criticism, associated initially with Andre Bazin in the late 1940s and later with the journal *Cahiers du Cinema*, from the early 1950s. Bazin and the *Cahiers* school insisted that a good film reflected its director's personal vision and articulated a unique viewpoint, while the best directors had a distinct visual style. The study of film, including Hollywood movies, was as valid an intellectual pursuit as studying a novel by Flaubert or a van Gogh painting.¹⁶

All these points, innovative and contentious at the time, underlay the articles by Pocock and Joseph. Both foreshadowed the *Cahiers* school's fascination with American genres, along with its admiration for the work of certain American *auteurs* such as Ford and Orson Welles. Moreover, both New Zealanders anticipated the *Cahiers* critics in their turn away from the previous decade's critical emphasis on the sociological aspect of film, with its focus on social issues and 'social realism'. The pair also preceded Truffaut and other *Cahiers*' critics in their rejection of what Pam Cook called the 'conventional division between "art" and "entertainment"' in the cinema.¹⁷ Instead of repeating stereotypes about Hollywood movies, these two academics brought a fresh and innovative perspective to New Zealand responses to that cinema.

¹⁵ Lindsay Anderson, 'Sequence: Introduction to a reprint', unpublished essay, Jeffrey Richards, 'Rethinking British Cinema' in Justine Ashby and Andrew Higson, eds, Andrew, *British Cinema, Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.24

¹⁶ See, for example, T. Jefferson Kline, 'The French New Wave' in Elizabeth Ezra, *European Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.159-162

¹⁷ Pam Cook, 'Authorship and the Cinema', Pam Cook and Mieke Bernink, eds, *The Cinema Book*, 2nd ed. (London: BFI Publications, 1999), p.288

III

The Wellington Film Society provided further evidence of the late 1940s' sea change in attitudes towards American film. About the time of Pocock's *Landfall* article, the W.F.S. journal published an editorial about Howard Hughes' western, *The Outlaw*, a film noted for its tawdry publicity campaign focusing on the physical attributes of its star, Jane Russell. The editorial observed that Anton Vogt's¹⁸ review in the *Southern Cross* had described the film as 'sexless, brainless and artless'. It also cited Mirams' opinion of *The Outlaw*. He had '...lost his temper at it, and, in a paroxysm of rage ...labelled it "unutterably cheap", meretricious", "puerile", "an incredibly bad job of picture-making."' The editorial then praised the film as 'entertaining and adult cinema'. It approved Hughes' realistic depiction of the West as 'an unwholesome, dirty, unpleasant, yet vigorous territory, where a horse WAS of more value than a woman'.¹⁹ Mirams angrily informed the editors that the film was 'a prime example of what can happen when profit is the only motive that matters.... Is it not one of the primary jobs of the Film Society to attack on all occasions the crude commercialism of the cinema? That, surely, is the real enemy of better standards'.²⁰ Mirams' stance gained support from another Society member who also found 'cause for alarm' in the Bulletin's defence of *The Outlaw*. 'It is the aim of the Film Society to improve standards of taste and develop an aesthetic appreciation of films. It is an incredible lapse from this high aim to class "The Outlaw" an [sic] "entertaining and adult cinema"'. (S)he accused the film of being 'destructive to social values'.²¹

This argument illustrated the conflict between two divergent postwar attitudes towards American cinema. For people like Mirams, Hollywood's 'crude commercialism' endangered an aesthetic hierarchy which required protection by its cultural guardians from the crass and venal elements of society. This approach presupposed an immutable set of 'standards', a key term in their aesthetic lexicon. In this mindset, there existed some ideal Platonic barometer of the arts watched by aesthetic invigilators anxious to detect signs of cultural low-pressure systems approaching across the Pacific. For these critics of *The Outlaw* there was an essential conjunction between aesthetic and societal values. An erosion of the one meant the despoliation of the other. However, this approach was now challenged.

¹⁸ Vogt was a member of the WFS, a poet and essayist, and an associate of W.J. Scott. He became a lecturer in Scott's department at the Wellington Teachers' College.

¹⁹ *Wellington Film Society Monthly Bulletin*, No.14, September 1947, p.2

²⁰ 'Storm Over "The Outlaw"', *Monthly Bulletin*, No.15 (October 1947), pp.9-10

²¹ 'Storm Over "The Outlaw"', pp.8-9

The likes of Pocock and Joseph questioned the premise that commercial cinema as exemplified by Hollywood was innately suspect and inferior. Films unashamedly devoted to popular 'entertainment' were not necessarily without aesthetic merit or incapable of thoughtful comment on important issues. Even something as garish as *The Outlaw* was capable of re-evaluating the fundamental myths of American society and commenting on the vagaries of human behaviour.

This emerging viewpoint also recognised the reinvigorating role of the uniquely American cinematic genres such as westerns, musicals, animated and crime films in augmenting the cinematic and cultural gene pool. The new perspective was inclusive rather than exclusive. It rejected an aesthetic schema which Mirams and Fairburn had used to justify the non-admission of most American cinema into a jealously guarded and aesthetically privileged cultural club. Now that proscriptive approach, so popular with New Zealand intellectuals of the 1930s and 1940s, was threatened. Brash, vulgar, mercenary Hollywood was increasingly adjudged by some of their intellectual peers to be worthy of admittance into art's newest cultural pantheon.

During the late forties, an increasing number of reviewers adopted this more positive response to American cinema. The *National Review*'s critic, for example, cited *Gentleman's Agreement*'s stance on anti-Semitism and bigotry in the U.S.A. as an example of what it described as 'the very small number of American films ... which dare to pose a problem and argue it out calmly'. By contrast with other 'acquiescent and stupid' Hollywood movies, Elia Kazan's film was 'inquisitive and alert'.²² In 1949 that critic wrote an article which, like Pocock and Joseph, eulogised the films of John Ford for displaying not only consummate cinematic craftsmanship but also artistic insight.

Is there any man who sees the sky as splendidly as it appears to John Ford? The frailty and helplessness of man is perhaps the most important of the work of John Ford.... [who] has given the Western dignity, depth and beauty which but for him it might never have attained.²³

Commenting on *Blood on the Moon*, the reviewer pointed out Ford's technical mastery:

Notice the landscapes and the clouds, the angle shots, the painstaking attention to photographic effects –before Ford such effort was seldom “wasted” upon cowboys or Indians. Notice the insistent, repetitive use of close-ups. Nearly all the characterizations are enriched by this single device.²⁴

²² *National Review*, 15 March 1949, p.83

²³ *National Review*, 15 March 1949, p.81

²⁴ *National Review*, 15 April 1949, p.91

Ford's films, then, constituted an artistic oeuvre, not the anonymous products of an industrial process. His work rested within the context of a meritorious American craft of film-making, in which the influences and innovations of other American directors, D.W. Griffith and Orson Welles, contributed to the director's stylistic and technical achievements.²⁵

This more favourable perspective of Hollywood also appeared in a 1953 article, 'Hollywood and the Social Conscience', by Kendrick Howard. He applauded some American films as 'the keeper of the public morals ... exponent of the communal slap in the face....'²⁶ Howard described Hollywood as a 'gaudy example of all that is paradox. Preoccupied mainly with gorging the boy-meets-girl trade with its own lush diet of syrupy sentiment, it has often been curiously adventurous in its approach to social problems'.²⁷ Howard referenced several films to illustrate his argument. *My Man Godfrey*, for example, 'pointed out the decadence and moral corruption that inevitably accompanies inevitably accompanies blind trust in material values,' while *Fury* 'struck at the shallowness of communities which enable mass hysteria to displace individual thinking'.²⁸

Although the *Listener*'s new post-Miramis reviewers still complained about Hollywood, 'where they measure length rather than depth' and argued that it still lacked 'intellectual maturity', they now regularly praised the directing and technical prowess of Hollywood films.²⁹ Thus *It's Always Fair Weather*'s innovatory use of split screens and variable screen frames was praised as was *Girl in the Red Velvet Swing* for its editing, cinematography and its director's skilful handling of characters' relationships.³⁰ One *Listener* critic even noted that the films of Cecil de Mille, that archetype of Hollywood vulgarity and excess, had some merit: 'What de Mille knows (and I wish more directors realised it) is that his medium is the *moving picture*. Whatever his film may be –garish, vulgar, noisy, peopled with impossible characters, acting out impossible stories –they all keep moving'.³¹ Another reviewer's reaction to Ford's *Wagonmaster* two years later placed the director within the pantheon of 'art' cinema.

²⁵ *National Review*, 15 April 1949, pp.89-91

²⁶ Kendrick Howard, 'Hollywood and the Social Conscience', *Here & Now*, March 1953, p.21

²⁷ Howard, 'Social Conscience', p.18

²⁸ Howard, 'Social Conscience', p.18;20. Howard also maintained that contemporary Hollywood was losing its social consciousness, although he was unsure whether to ascribe this to the effects of McCarthyism or to what he regarded as more cohesive postwar U.S. society. 'Social Conscience', p.21

²⁹ *Listener*, 7 October 1949, p. 24; 17 February 1950, p.15

³⁰ *Listener*, 3 August 1956, p.16; 20 January 1956, p. 13

³¹ *Listener*, 16 July 1948, p.29

[H]is work seems to be in direct descent from the great silent directors, Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Griffiths. He has no equal in depicting the spacious landscapes of the West, and the basic struggle for survival of a frontier society.... the organic unity of this film, the conception of the action in broad masterly sweeps that move with unmatched vigour, sequence by sequence, through a predetermined pattern to the end.³²

The perceived social content of film was no longer a crucial concern. Instead, there was a new emphasis on the integration of action into the film's structure, and the director's use of the western genre to examine a settler society.

IV

For years the default response of most New Zealand intellectuals to Hollywood movies asserted that they constituted a cultural narcotic, consumed unthinkingly by intellectually moribund audiences. This claim, given intellectual responsibility by the adherents of the Frankfurt and *Scrutiny* schools, represented the invocation of a fashionable mantra rather than an analysis based on an investigation of the New Zealand cinema-going audience. Had critics examined the *New Zealand Motion Pictures Exhibitors' Bulletin* they would have found columns devoted to evaluating films scheduled for New Zealand release, from a significant perspective. How might different types of audiences in different areas react to particular films and film genres, based on the previous receptions of films of similar genres, content or stars?

An analysis of these *Bulletin* evaluations reveals that local cinema audiences were hardly an indiscriminating mass of automatons who would watch anything projected onto a cinema screen. It shows that their responses to Hollywood films were not uniform, and varied considerably according to such factors as gender, age, geographic location and social-educational status. It also reveals that New Zealand cinema audiences' tastes in cinematic subject-matter was never static, but evolved over time. War films, for example, had been popular with a wide range of cinemagoers during the early and mid-forties. However, the *Bulletin's* assessments of the popularity of that genre, especially with females, grew more pessimistic later in the decade.³³ They were in the process of being replaced in all-round

³² *Listener*, 23 February 1951, p.16

³³ However, the occasional big-budget, large-cast British war film, based on notable events in the second war film such as the Battle of Britain, the convoys to Russia and the Malta siege – *Reach for the Sky*, *The Cruel Sea*, and *Angels One Five* – proved very popular with New Zealanders. The *Bulletin* recommended the latter as likely to 'appeal to most audiences' because its characters were 'so essentially British and the dialogue underplays the heroics'. *Bulletin*, 15 November 1952, p.7. Sarah Street's analysis of postwar British film argues

popularity by comedies, both American and British; in 1950 the *Bulletin* declared that ‘comedy is high in public favour at present’.³⁴ Typical comments about comedies’ prospects include comments about being ‘well-received by the New Zealand public’ and ‘good entertainment for general audiences’.³⁵

In 1951 the *Bulletin* declared that ‘the fate of war films is always problematical’ and warned cinema managers that they must ascertain the likelihood of whether ‘war subjects are acceptable to local patrons’.³⁶ The film which elicited this comment, *The Halls of Montezuma*, about American marines in the Pacific, was evaluated as ‘directed solely to masculine audiences’. Only a few American war movies, such as *Soldiers Three*, were regarded as having the potential to overcome the handicap of overcoming what the *Bulletin* called ‘a male story’ yet possessing, ‘sufficient substance to secure a full quota of feminine patrons’.³⁷

This female audience was readily identified by the *Bulletin* as a crucial segment of the New Zealand film-going public. Managers were advised that ‘[e]mphasis should be devoted to the fact that [*The Glass Menagerie*]... is a woman’s picture’; *East Side West Side* had ‘very strong feminine appeal ...not favoured by action audiences’; *A Letter to Three Wives* would appeal ‘particularly to the fair sex’ and *Woman in the Hall* should be aimed at ‘the womenfolk and the more sophisticated type of audience’. This latter group apparently excluded those in rural areas, for *Woman* was assessed as ‘not a particularly good film for country audiences’. Films about crime and sports like boxing, however, were identified as appealing to those who attended ‘lesser houses’ and ‘action houses’, which were consistently identified as the theatres of choice of ‘male patrons’.³⁸

The *Bulletin* also differentiated between what it called the ‘less sophisticated’ and ‘the sophisticates’. Thus *Escape* and *Key to the City* were adjudged to be lacking appeal for the former group. *The River* was declared ‘problematical entertainment for the masses’ but appropriate ‘for better class houses and in the country districts for those nights when the

that these films not only marginalised women; they looked backward to a decade when ‘being British depended on certain notions of class, hierarchy, and codes of male heroism’. Sarah Street, ‘From Ealing Comedy to the British New Wave’, in Ezra, Elizabeth, *European Cinema* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.182. Perhaps the popularity of these three films in New Zealand in the fifties represented the remnants of nostalgia for those notions, proof that the influx of Hollywood social values was not unsurmountable. It may also be proof of 1950s New Zealanders’ sound judgement of films: a half-century later all three films reveal considerable merit in pacing, editing and direction.

³⁴ *New Zealand Motion Pictures Exhibitors’ Bulletin*, 23 September 1950, p.7

³⁵ *Exhibitors’ Bulletin*, 7 April 1951, p.7; 3 June 1950, p.6

³⁶ *Exhibitors’ Bulletin*, 22 December 1951, p.7; 25 August 1951, p.8

³⁷ *Exhibitors’ Bulletin*, 2 February 1952, p.5

³⁸ e.g. *Exhibitors’ Bulletin*, 4 March 1950, p.6; 2 February 1952, p.5

clientele is more select'. Similarly, films like *Fourteen Hours*, *So Long at the Fair*, *Red Danube* and *Quartette* were for 'better class patronage', 'good-class audiences' and 'discriminating audiences'.³⁹ In a remarkably precise feat of audience identification, the *Bulletin*'s analyst predicted that *Hills of Home*, starring Lassie the dog, would meet inevitable success with 'family audiences, dog lovers, and in rural areas'.⁴⁰ New Zealand's rural moviegoers also responded enthusiastically to westerns.⁴¹ *Coroner Creek* – 'lots of fighting and shooting' – was recommended for backblocks audiences. So were *Winchester '73* ('must particularly appeal to those in rural areas'), while *Broken Arrow* was 'a natural for country situations'.⁴²

There were even audiences of intellectuals. Publicity for *The Glass Menagerie*, the *Bulletin* advised, 'should be aimed at the cultural section of the community', observing that one of its selling-points should be 'the author's name – Tennessee Williams', comments that would have astounded people like Maurice Duggan and Pearson, whose gloomy evaluations of New Zealanders' cultural literacy suggested that those familiar with the playwright's work would scarcely number enough to fill one cinema's projection booth. However, the *Bulletin* believed that New Zealand did possess an intelligentsia of some numbers – even if it was confined to university cities. Its survey of *Sunset Boulevard* declared its allure to be 'limited to the intellectual and students of the cinema', warning that Wilder's masterpiece was certainly 'not a small-town film'. *Anna Lucasta* would interest 'more cultured patrons', an enthusiasm that the *Bulletin* doubted would be shared its 'country and rural audiences', while *Pinky*'s audience would consist of 'the more thoughtful'.⁴³

³⁹ *Exhibitors' Bulletin*, 1 December 1951, p.5; 19 May 1951, p.3; 17 June 1950, p.17

⁴⁰ *Exhibitors' Bulletin*, 25 June 1949, p.12

⁴¹ *Exhibitors' Bulletin*, 19 May 1951, p.3; 14 October 1950, p.8; 6 August 1949, p.7; 18 December 1948, p.6

⁴² In Ruatoria, according to Wayne Brittenden, 'westerns were the staple diet of the townsfolk'; once a member of the audience decided to assist an endangered western hero by firing a rifle shot at the villain's forehead on screen. Some of the town's younger members would follow western screenings by tying kerosene tins to their horses and galloping along the street. Wayne Brittenden, *The Celluloid Circus: the Heyday of the New Zealand Picture Theatre* (Auckland: Godwit, 2008), p.113. The *Bulletin* of the Wellington Film Society identified Ruatoria as 'the Mecca of Autry fans' (Gene Autry was a singing cowboy, whose films were popular during the 1940s and early 50s) *Monthly Bulletin of the Wellington Film Society*, April, 1952, p.7

⁴³ *Exhibitors' Bulletin*, 15 July 1950, p.6; 20 May 1950, p.6 Even in a sparsely populated country like New Zealand, cinema audiences had specialised and selective tastes, with city cinemas allocating certain films to cater for these differentiated movie-going publics. Thus the Wellington Film Society's *Bulletin* claimed that the city's Paramount theatre was the one for the 'discriminating filmgoer'. *Wellington Film Society Bulletin*, 1 December 1947, p.2. Wayne Brittenden's superb account of New Zealand's motion picture theatres in the heyday of cinema's popularity reveals that in cities and large towns, specific theatres specialised in showing types of films for specific audiences. Christchurch's *Grand / Embassy* theatre for example, attracted a 'rough' element; the Avon showed films that appealed to enthusiasts of British cinema. See Brittenden, *Celluloid Circus: passim*. A survey of postwar Christchurch newspaper advertisements shows the *Tivoli* and *Plaza* theatres specialising in 'male' genre movies such as war and gangster films, with the *Savoy*, and *Regent* cinemas showing films of a wider appeal, especially comedies, musicals and family entertainment.

The *Bulletin*'s surveys of New Zealand cinema audiences provides further evidence that they were hardly the undifferentiated, amorphous mass postulated by public intellectuals like Mirams and Scott. Rather, these audiences were segmented and selective; their tastes evolved and their cinematic loyalties changed. Different publics of cinemagoers preferred different types of films. Geographical location and social and educational differences also played important roles in audience composition and preference. These varieties of audience reception outlined in the *Bulletin* suggests that these viewers were indeed 'members of multiple communities of meaning', active agents in a complex process of interaction between their worldviews and those of the movies.⁴⁴

This conclusion is also justified by the evidence provided by the cinema notebooks and correspondence of an inveterate moviegoer of the forties and fifties. Irene George was a Wellington typist, born just before World War I. From the 1930s to the early sixties she kept notebooks in which she carefully listed every feature film that she saw. Between 1929 and 1944, for example, she listed 4274 films. During the 1945-1960 period she saw 2342 films. George particularly admired the film star Joan Crawford, and corresponded with her for thirty-two years. For years her rooms were crammed with photos, clipping and memorabilia of Hollywood stars, especially Joan Crawford. Not only did she run a New Zealand Joan Crawford fan club, she also wrote items for the *Joan Crawford News*, a forerunner of late twentieth century fanzines. Her choice of Crawford as a focus for her admiration was significant. Crawford had a well-deserved reputation in Hollywood for independence and assertiveness, and clashed frequently with powerful patriarchal Hollywood studio hierarchies. She favoured roles portraying determined and ambitious women battling male prejudice and social conventions. Irene George similarly appears to have been a good-humoured, unconventional and forthright woman. She displayed 'unladylike habits': wearing slacks, smoking heavily and swearing frequently. She had a wide range of friends and acquaintances, and for a time was a figure on Wellington's social scene.⁴⁵

According to the theories of Adorno and Horkheimer, Irene George should have been just another victim of mass culture, captured by Hollywood glamour, reduced to the status of unthinking automaton, indiscriminately and unreflectively viewing anything on a

⁴⁴ Clive Marsh, 'Audience Reception' in John Lyden, ed, *The Routledge Companion to Religion and Film* (Abingdon & New York: Routledge, 2009), p.267

⁴⁵ All evidence from the Irene George Collection, DO 618, Notebooks; Scrapbooks, Folders 1-6, New Zealand Film Archive, David Denby, 'The Joan Crawford Problem', *New Yorker*, 3 January 2011, pp.65-68.

screen. Yet she was a feisty, independent person. Her notebooks provide revealing evidence about her comprehensive tastes in cinema. For years she saw most feature films that opened in Wellington. However, her notebooks reveal that these included the so-called ‘art’ and ‘foreign’ films praised by the likes of Mirams and Scott, and considered by them to be the domain of the intellectual elite. In 1947, for example, she saw three Italian neo-realism films, *Paisan*, *Shoeshine* and *Stromboli*. During the next eight years she saw a range of art-house films, including *Bitter Rice* and *Clochermerle*, Orson Welles’ version of *Othello* and an early Ingmar Bergman, listed as *Isle of Love*.⁴⁶ Her cinematic vista, then, was not confined to Hollywood. The Crawford-George correspondence also shows that the New Zealander was no passive consumer of Hollywood pap. George cast a shrewdly observant eye over Crawford’s films, complaining about Americans’ inarticulate voices, mocking sentimental story-lines, condemning inferior Crawford films like *Torch Story* and declaring that *Gorgeous Hussy* lacked international appeal. The star sought the New Zealander’s opinion: ‘I love your honest criticism’ Crawford told her.⁴⁷

V

One of the staples of the left’s post-1945 critique was the almost reflexive assumption that Pinewood was superior to Hollywood and that Hollywood was less realistic, more violent and more socially unpalatable than Pinewood. Hence the *People’s Voice* acclaimed ‘the grim realism and forthrightness which ... finds its expression throughout British film’, in contrast to the ‘oversweet colouring affected by American productions’⁴⁸. Hollywood, the newspaper declared in 1948, was merely ‘skidding around “controversial” issues’, producing ‘meaningless melodrama and threadbare comedies’, whereas British studios produced films of a ‘higher level’.⁴⁹ The *Voice* was especially harsh on postwar American comedy: ‘people who laugh at [Bob] Hope and [Jerry] Lewis are being played for suckers. Objectively, these films take our minds off reality, weaken our trust in ourselves and other people, and make us easier game for cold-war propaganda’. By contrast, Norman

⁴⁶ Bergman’s film was shown in Europe as *Sommaren von Monika*.

⁴⁷ Irene George Notebooks, unpagged

⁴⁸ *People’s Voice*, 26 September 1945, p.2

⁴⁹ *People’s Voice*, 18 February 1948, p.3

Wisdom, the British equivalent of Lewis, but who wore a workingman's cloth cap, belonged to 'the Chaplin tradition'.⁵⁰

The left's insistence on the superiority of British cinema over American was shared by some of the crucial institutions representing midcentury bourgeois New Zealand respectability. Several submissions to the 1948 Motion Pictures Industry Committee condemned the movies' prevalent depiction of American culture and values over their British counterparts on local screens.⁵¹ The Presbyterian Church's spokesman Jack Somerville declared that 'along with many others in the community, Church people prefer British pictures because they are more in line with our British way of life and illustrate the standards of our society'.⁵² He also claimed that the Church committee's questionnaire sent to parents, clergy, youth workers, teachers and women's groups revealed that the majority of them believed that 'British way of life should be displayed on the New Zealand screen'.⁵³ Comments from the 'family group' of respondents announced that '[w]e are strongly in favour of British films as setting forth a way of life that is not too different from ours. We prefer also the English speech'.⁵⁴ Hollywood, Somerville declared, was 'completely out of touch with the life of ordinary mortals lived in British countries'.⁵⁵

Like the Presbyterians, the left focused its attention on the perceived social and cultural effects of American culture. However, its perspective was now located within the new context of Cold War politics. Bill Pearson, for example, encapsulated American cinema and comics as carriers of cultural bacilli that spread aesthetic, moral and social contamination amongst an intellectually and politically comatose population. What Antje

⁵⁰ 'What Has Happened to Film Comedy?' *People's Voice*, 8 September 1954, pp.6-7 American screen comedians, according to the article, were 'smart showmen ... who exploit and manipulate our responses as cunningly as the men who write advertisements'. Bob Hope, for example, '[b]y the expression on his face, the timing of his repartee, his appeals to the smart-alec in us, makes us want to put it over the other joker – a capitalist attitude'. The humour of Jerry Lewis, very popular in 1950s New Zealand was deemed 'exhibitionistic, infantile ... deeply opposed to humanity and to life'. In fact, the backgrounds and comic personas of Lewis and Wisdom are identical in many ways. The careers of both began in music hall / vaudeville venues. Both played characters of lowly social origin, naïve, bumbling and uncertain, unfashionably clothed, physically unimpressive but compassionate and honest. The comedy of their cinematic routines often resulted from their intrusion into a wealthier and more sophisticated social milieu whose hypocrisy and venality was inadvertently exposed by the comic hero.

⁵¹ Established primarily to investigate allegations of monopolistic domination of film supply and distribution in New Zealand by the two large local cinema chains and their American-based studio suppliers-distributors.

⁵² Statement by J.S. Somerville, Convenor of the Public Questions Committee of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, Item # 28, to Motion Pictures Industry Committee, undated, Part 1 IC1 1207 27/1/1, p.1, Archives New Zealand, Wellington, (ANZ)

⁵³ Somerville statement, p.2

⁵⁴ Somerville statement, p.3

⁵⁵ Somerville statement, p.3

Bendarek calls his ‘spiteful condemnation of the ordinary New Zealander’⁵⁶ received its most famous expression in *Fretful Sleepers*. Using a series of sweeping generalisations, Pearson alleged that a New Zealander’s ‘most common facial expression is a sneer’, and that the public – always assumed to be male – was conformist, materialistic, unreflective and intellectually torpid.⁵⁷ Pearson’s unflattering portrayal of New Zealand filmgoers was outlined in 1953, where he complained that New Zealand’s ‘uncritical audiences’ were ‘greatly duped by films’. He regarded American films as the driving force behind that nation’s programme of cultural imperialism. They were also agents for inciting an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion that would eventually result in war. Hollywood was responsible for deliberately instilling a fear and misunderstanding of science amongst people, this being part of American industry’s plan to terrify the masses into rejecting the alternative energy source that could be provided by atomic science. In a revealing passage he described Hollywood films as ‘the most effective propaganda for the American way of life, for the crusade against Communism, for the general decivilisation of the “free world”’.⁵⁸

Although Pearson conceded that a few American films ‘attempt[ed] some honesty’, these too were inexorably tainted. The mordant *Sunset Boulevard* and *The Bad and the Beautiful*, bitter critiques of Hollywood culture, were, in Pearson’s view, ‘infected and constantly cheapen and belittle the human spirit, weakening people’s faith in themselves’. This image of cultural infection was a recurring motif for the left. Referring to a recent Hollywood version of *War of the Worlds*, Pearson mused over the Martians’ fatal inability to resist terrestrial bacteria. Was Hollywood mentally preparing us to accept the ‘necessity’ of germ warfare?⁵⁹ The imagery of adulteration and contamination occurs throughout Pearson’s fictional and non-fictional discourses on American popular culture.

Another member of the NZCP, Basil Holmes, also utilised the left’s overarching gangrenist imagery. The main theme of Holmes’ critique was that of cultural imperialism. ‘This is the ideological war!’ he announced, and equated American cultural capitalism with Nazism, alleging that ‘Wall St. plans the production of a mass Belsen brains [sic]’.⁶⁰ Every form of Hollywood cinema was tainted according to Watson. Its newsreels spewed ‘political

⁵⁶ Antje Bednarek ‘Put on the Margins: the Mainstream Culture and the Alienated Writer in the Fifties’, (M.S.S. thesis, Lincoln University 2006), p.11

⁵⁷ Bill Pearson, ‘Fretful Sleepers: a Sketch of New Zealand Behaviour and Its Implications for the Artist’, *Landfall*, Vol.6 No.3 (September 1952), p.206

⁵⁸ Letter from Pearson, *Here & Now*, June 1953, p.34

⁵⁹ Letter from Pearson, *Here & Now*, p.34

⁶⁰ ‘Films and World Peace’, *Labour Review*, p.8

poison'; apparently harmless cartoons spread 'reactionary philosophy in technicolour'. Westerns provided 'demonstrations of caveman and Manhattan morals'; historical-themed movies were 'a study in sex'. Films about social problems were mere 'slumming expeditions'. Overall, American cinema was saturated by 'studied thuggery'.⁶¹ Moviegoers were passive and drugged recipients of American cultural propaganda. '[S]oft seats and circus music force audience reception Wall St. plotters design to stupefy people, via lowered lights and soft seats, into creatures of Wall St'.⁶²

From 1951 to 1954 the *Labour Review* recommended local communists join forces with child welfare, educational, church and other moral entrepreneurs to campaign against American films and other American popular media. This tactic, as we have seen, was also a key element in the left's attack on comics and pulps. Housewives, for example, could be invited to sewing afternoons and afternoon teas organised by party members, where they could discuss such topics as 'present-day films and comics ...and their effects upon the children'. Such conversations would be 'directed' to raise awareness about 'the ruthless attacks on our children's minds', aimed at making them 'robots for the American war machine'.⁶³ The *People's Voice* and the *Labour Review* echoed mainstream politicians like Nash and Ross in demanding more overt methods of controlling films and comics. The *Voice* recommended boycotts of Hollywood movies, urging a public campaign in which 'tens of thousand of alarmed parents, teachers, church and civic leaders' would pressure the Holland government to stop the 'FLOOD OF FILTH' and the 'tide of poison'.⁶⁴ The *Review* demanded cultural proscription: "'import control" can be slammed on Yank influence now'.⁶⁵ Such criticism honed many of the arguments that had been directed against Hollywood by Mirams and Fairburn, adapting them to appeal to New Zealanders concerned about the maintenance of family and moral values in a confused and contentious postwar world.

This leftist critique also articulated apprehensions that an emerging, distinctive, New Zealand national identity was being suffocated by the overwhelming impress of American cultural imperialism. During 1951-2 the *Labour Review* questioned the impact of films and other American popular culture on the emergence of a distinct New Zealand cultural

⁶¹ 'Films and World Peace', *Labour Review*, pp.8-10

⁶² 'Films and World Peace', *Labour Review*, p.8

⁶³ 'Winning the Women for Peace', *Labour Review*, December-January 1951-2, p. 19.

⁶⁴ 'Tidal Wave of Juvenile Crime', *People's Voice*, 14 April 1954, p.3

⁶⁵ 'New Zealand – Nation on Guard', *Labour Review*, February 1952, p.30

identity. In 'Towards a People's Culture', A. Jackson-Thomas claimed that New Zealanders were

culturally inarticulate due to our small population and the ease with which overseas ideas and culture can penetrate the country, thus inhibiting the growth of a native culture. Because our culture is derivative from other countries, the emergence of new forms have not been as apparent here as overseas.⁶⁶

His prediction that an autochthonous New Zealand culture would be suffocated by an overwhelming American culture was given an interesting twist in another *Review* article, 'New Zealand – Nation on Guard'. Its anonymous author agreed that American cultural impact was severe, arguing that U.S. 'warmongers' sought to debase New Zealanders' moral values and 'sap our nationhood' through brutal and sexually explicit films, comics, and magazines, along with 'bribes' and Fulbright scholarships. 'The invasion creeps steadily along'. But unlike Jackson-Thomas, (s)he insisted this American onslaught was not irresistible. It could even have a positive, catalytic effect: the 'very challenge of Yank corruption' could stimulate the growth of a distinctive local culture. New Zealand was not 'the sponge of the antipodes – absorbing culture from the rest of the world'.⁶⁷ Reaction to the gritty and intrusive irritant that was American culture would help propagate a distinctive New Zealand culture.

Others on the left portrayed New Zealand cinemagoers as 'contaminated and doped' by Hollywood.⁶⁸ When the Christchurch Marxist academic Winston Rhodes visited a cinema in the U.S.S.R. in the early fifties, he implicitly compared the tastes of Russian cinema audiences with their New Zealand counterparts. For Russian audiences there were 'no gaudy advertisements of crime and sex, nor were there any of the vulgar trimmings to drug the mind and debase the taste of the film-goer'. And the films they viewed were not intended for audiences seeking relief from boredom, or 'demanding an orgy of sex and crime'. The Russian audience, Rhodes claimed, took pleasure in watching programmes with newsreels showing tree-planting brigades at work, followed by a feature film about 'the problem of creating new attitudes in factory organisation'.⁶⁹

The New Zealand public would not have shared Rhodes' idea of a good evening out at the 'pictures'. There was a huge gap between what most New Zealanders' preferred to watch and what those on cultural patrol believed they should watch. For all their proclaimed

⁶⁶ 'Towards a People's Culture', *Labour Review*, December-January 1951-2, p.12

⁶⁷ 'New Zealand – Nation on Guard', p.30

⁶⁸ 'The Communist Attitude to Sex, Women and Youth', *Labour Review*, December-January 1951-2, p.22

⁶⁹ 'A Programme of Pictures', *People's Voice*, 7 March 1951, p.3

political radicalism, most on the left expressed conservative, even reactionary, attitudes to culture. Like some on the right, they also scorned the vulgarity and crassness of American films. For all their condemnation of the bourgeoisie, their objections to Hollywood's 'tastelessness', expressed in complaints about unsuitable language and slang, dress and unconventional sexual mores, exposed bourgeois concerns of their own about the niceties of conventional social behaviour. Locke, Hilliard and others on the left had a paternalistic and patronising attitude to the public. Like J.G. Coates and Hilda Ross on the right, they believed that this audience required guidance and control from their intellectual and cultural superiors. Ironically, both radicals and conservatives shared a similar mental framework, that of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century civic bourgeoisie.

Such distorted ideological and cultural perspectives prevented the left from observing that postwar American cinema frequently portrayed a dystopic and subversive critique of capitalist American society, targeting the very values and institutions that were themselves the subject of condemnation from the left.⁷⁰ Many of the postwar films of Billy Wilder and John Huston, for example, offered 'a critique of capitalism and repressive social roles' in American society.⁷¹ The period's *film noirs* and 'social problem' genre questioned the ideals of capitalism itself and explored topics previously ignored onscreen, such as racism and institutional corruption. In some films respectable bourgeois characters were revealed as murderers, corporate interests exploited the public, the justice system was portrayed as corrupt and some criminal activities justified because, as one character says in *The Asphalt Jungle*, crime was just 'a left-handed form of human endeavour'. The frequently bleak and shabby settings of such films, their gritty story lines, and interest in criminal and pathological mores seemed far removed from elitist condemnations of American movies as frivolous, merely providing glamour, sentimentality and superficiality.

Miramis and others attacked this mordant realism and pessimism as fervently as they condemned Hollywood for its artificiality and optimism. Yet the new perspective that Joseph and others opened on American cinema was to achieve wider public attention thanks

⁷⁰ Larry Ribstein's 'Hollywood and Vine: Hollywood's View of Business', <[U Illinois Law & Economics Research Paper No. LE05-010](#)> demonstrates that Hollywood has, from D.W. Griffith to Oliver Stone, consistently presented a negative view of business, stemming from filmmakers' resentment of capitalist constraints on their artistic vision. In return U.S. business interests have persistently condemned Hollywood for having a left-wing bias. Paper accessed 15 April 2009.

⁷¹ Lary May, *The Big Tomorrow: Hollywood and the Politics of the American Way* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p.128; Harry Benshoff & Sean Griffin, *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies* 2nd ed, (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp.37-8

to the work of J.C. Reid, one of the leading public intellectuals of the immediate postwar period.

VI

Reid's evolving attitude towards American cinema reflects the emergence of a more sophisticated and insightful approach towards Hollywood and its New Zealand audiences. He shared certain similarities with Mirams. Both men were influential film critics. As Sigley has shown, both 'stroved to educate the public and to develop [its] film discrimination'.⁷² Both provided much of the enthusiasm behind the establishment of the small but growing number of film societies in postwar New Zealand.⁷³ In 1951, for example, Reid described his fellow film society members as 'apostles of good film' who should spread the cinematic gospel amongst adolescents and schoolchildren. Like Mirams he also insisted that cinema was now a 'more widespread cultural environmental factor' than literature or music. Accordingly, teachers must 'plant the critical seeds which would, when they grow, prevent the children from taking American concepts uncritically, and confusing "glamour" with "reality"'.⁷⁴ But from the early 1950s Reid condemned Mirams' sociological approach towards films. He accused him of being 'inclined ... to use a film as a mere occasion to expound his views on political and sociological themes'.⁷⁵

Reid's increasing divergence from Mirams' outlook on American cinema and its New Zealand audience can best be exemplified by comparing two of his critiques on film. In 1948 Reid wrote four articles on 'Catholics and the Cinema' for the *Catholic Review*, a short-lived journal of the arts, science and culture.⁷⁶ Within the year, his articles would be

⁷² Simon Sigley, 'Film Culture: Its Development in New Zealand, 1929 – 1972', (Ph.D thesis, University of Auckland, 2003), p.25. As Sigley shows, Reid was instrumental in the formation of the Auckland Film Society, and the New Zealand Film Society, of which he was president during its crucial formative years from 1949 to 1951, as well as being tutor for the Wellington Film School on its inception in 1954. At the end of that year, he began writing film reviews for the *Auckland Star*; his popular columns continued until the 1960s.

⁷³ D.I.B. Smith, 'John Cowie Reid' in Nichols Tarling, ed, *Auckland Minds and Matters* (Auckland: University of Auckland Press, 2003), p.117

⁷⁴ Reid's Presidential address to the annual conference of the New Zealand Film Society, February 1951, *Monthly Bulletin of the Wellington Film Society*, 14 April 1951, pp.3-4

⁷⁵ J.C. Reid, *Catholics and the Films* (Auckland: Whitcombe & Tombs Ltd, 1949), p.54

⁷⁶ The next year Reid took up an appointment in the English department at Auckland University College. He had previously worked as a clerk the Valuations Department, a secondary school teacher, and as an education officer in the Army during the war. During his time as a University student in the late thirties, he gained an Honours degree in English and French, wrote poems described by Keith Sinclair as 'fevered religious verse', acted for the Drama club, edited a literary journal, sub-edited the student magazine and became President of the Students' Association. After his war service he returned to teaching until his appointment to the English department at Auckland University in 1949. There he became a tremendously popular figure with his students,

published under the title *Catholics and the Films*. This book, after *Speaking Candidly*, was the second work on film published in New Zealand.⁷⁷

The essence of Reid's message in *Catholics and the Films*⁷⁸ was articulated in a statement he made in 1947: '[t]he film is the one universal of our age, as the Church was in medieval times'.⁷⁹ This was a more dramatic and universal application of Mirams' claim in *Speaking Candidly* about the centrality of cinema in New Zealand culture. Like Mirams, Reid relied heavily on the work of Margaret Thorp and Leo Rosten in emphasising on the ubiquity of Hollywood's cultural influence here.

[M]any of the imaginative figures of the children's lore of the past have been superseded by Donald Duck and Popeye, the Big Bad Wolf, Goofy, Superman and Tarzan.... Dorothy Lamour and Hedy La Marr replace Goldilocks and Little Miss Muffett; Errol Flynn and Gene Autry take the place of Ulysses and King Arthur. All this is aided by Mickey Mouse pinafores, Pluto scarves, Popeye comics, movie magazines and all the rest of the commercial sidelines of the picture-factories.⁸⁰

This resulted, he claimed, in most New Zealand high school and university students being familiar with the names of American film stars but lacking any 'background of Christian or Biblical reference whatever'.⁸¹ Furthermore, he regarded the shallowness of Hollywood movies as emblematic of America itself, for '[t]he preoccupation of American movies with fantasy, escapist entertainment, and adolescent values might not unreasonably be taken as reflecting the essentially brash and adolescent civilization of the American nation'.⁸²

Like Mirams, Reid denounced the business-oriented ethos of American cinema and its consequences: 'sex, crime, sadism, glamour and romance will sell most pictures; and Hollywood aims always at the biggest profits'. Consequently, he maintained, 'film today is

some of whom cheered and applauded his lectures; a few rolled in the aisles with glee at his witticisms. Keith Sinclair remarked of Reid that he had 'immense energy, enthusiasm and a vast range of knowledge', while his intellectual growth continued throughout his life. However neither Reid's conservative religious views nor his distrust of socialist ideas met the approval of some of his fellow Auckland intellectuals, including Sinclair himself and Maurice Duggan. Frank Sargeson disliked him so much that he viciously satirised him as a pompous wife-beater in *Memoirs of a Peon*. Richards, *To Bed at Noon*, p.109; Nicholas Reid, 'Après le Deluge, Moi: Letter to My Father From His youngest Son' in Bill Sewell, ed, *Sons of the Fathers: New Zealand Men Talk About Their Fathers* (Birkenhead: Tandem Press, 1997), p.97; Keith Sinclair with Trudie McNaughton, *A History of the University of Auckland, 1883 – 1983* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1983), p.183; D.I.B. Smith, 'John Cowie Reid, in Nicholas Tarling, ed, *Auckland Minds and Matters* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2003), p.117; Nicholas Reid, *Letter*, pp. 96-7

⁷⁷ Bruce Babington, *A History of the New Zealand Fiction Feature Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p.2

⁷⁸ With a few minor exceptions, the 1949 book is identical to the four articles published the previous year in *Catholic Review* as 'Catholics and the Cinema'. All subsequent references are from the book.

⁷⁹ 'The Influence of the Film', *NZ Tablet*, 12 May 1947, p.17

⁸⁰ Reid, *Catholics*, p.4

⁸¹ Reid, *Catholics*, pp.4-5

⁸² Reid, *Catholics*, p.38

mainly a commercial commodity, like perfumes or pulp-magazines, with its moral and artistic aspects very largely ignored'.⁸³ 'Hollywood', he believed, 'has borrowed from every film-making nation in the world and it has almost invariably vulgarised its borrowings'.⁸⁴ It was this perceived vulgarity and amorality that drew Reid's most robust criticism in the late forties. He condemned the 'essential barbarity of Hollywood culture',⁸⁵ and deplored its harmful effects on New Zealand youth, who, he claimed found in cinema

a handy source of behaviour patterns ... and a set of values in which the Christian virtues are forgotten, and in which pushfulness, wealth, surface attraction, smart clothes, easy sexual-relationships, are the main ingredients.⁸⁶

In his 1948 critique Reid maintained that the local movie audience was unable to comprehend the deplorable artistic and moral features of cinema in its guise of Hollywood confectionary. He devoted one section to a consideration of 'The Passive Movie-Goer', which uses language redolent of Adorno and Horkheimer:

The entire atmosphere of a motion-picture theatre encourages receptivity. A mind relaxed, passively absorbing impressions, as is normally the case in the cinema, is susceptible to influences as an active, stimulated mind is not ... the individual personality is pulped, made softly receptive, by the cinema, and effortlessly, escape is found, and values are absorbed subconsciously.⁸⁷

Reid declared that New Zealand cinema-goers were an unsophisticated audience, addicted to Hollywood-style fare that 'appeal to low levels of taste and intelligence, ... [and] grossly distort reality' and whose 'implicit values, moral and intellectual, are unhealthy – in short, ... they are 'dope''.⁸⁸ He insisted that this audience was an "'atomized" mass who happily accepted 'the almost unbelievable vulgarity and lack of taste exhibited by the ordinary American movie'. At the same time he extolled the role of the educated elite – 'the person trained in literary or dramatic values', that 'small community in which men and women understand, share and create'.⁸⁹ In 1948 he claimed that certain films must be 'restricted to groups of viewers who take an active interest in the cinema artistically and technically'.⁹⁰ As

⁸³ Reid, *Catholics*, p.11; p.12

⁸⁴ Reid, *Catholics*, p.43

⁸⁵ Reid, *Catholics*, p.6; p.8

⁸⁶ Reid, *Catholics*, p.8

⁸⁷ Reid, *Catholics*, p.7

⁸⁸ Reid, *Catholics*, p.43

⁸⁹ Reid, *Catholics*, pp.7-8

⁹⁰ Reid, *Catholics*, p. 29

for Catholic moviegoers: 'certain films which Catholics of taste and intelligence may appreciate may not be suitable for the untutored Catholic'.⁹¹

Five years after the publication of *Catholics and the Films*, Reid became the *Auckland Star*'s film reviewer, a post he held until the 1960s. An analysis of his mid-fifties film reviews reveals a shift in his response towards Hollywood cinema, although certain constants remained. He still deplored the sentimentality, materialism and chauvinism of many American films. Yet he now applauded many Hollywood movies, not only for their narrative adroitness and technological innovation, but also for their willingness to explore moral and social issues, and the high quality of their acting. The judgemental and elitist approach of his *Review* period had given way to a more tolerant and inclusive approach both to American cinema, and its New Zealand audience.

How can this transformation be explained? The impact of a growing family may have had a mellowing impact. His rather self-righteous religious dogmatism had certainly softened. Reid's 1950s film criticism strongly suggests that he was influenced by the theories of the *Cahier du Cinema* school, for he now emphasised the roles of the director as *auteur*, and of editing, cinema-photography and *mise-en-scene*, as crucial tools for transferring meaningful intellectual and emotional content to the screen. Furthermore, Reid's intellectual horizon was expanded by his post-1948 exposure to the eclectic opinions of his students at Auckland University College. Reid was an immensely popular lecturer, admired for his willingness to discuss cultural and political issues with the student body. He was undoubtedly influenced by M.K. Joseph, his long-time friend and colleague, who saw in popular culture and American film features that were aesthetically valuable, and capable of yielding moral and philosophical insights.

By the 1950s Reid had immersed himself in popular culture, and displayed 'great pleasure in, and healthy respect for, cultural vulgarity'.⁹² Reid loved comics, the Marx Brothers and Laurel and Hardy, as well as the 'Goon Show' and later, TV sit-coms. At home he performed the vaudeville routines of his youth. He even appeared on commercial radio to discuss the latest hit songs. His fondness for 'low' culture was still regarded by some of his colleagues as 'disgustingly lowbrow and vulgar'.⁹³ And by 1950 Reid condemned

⁹¹ Reid, *Catholics*, p.15. Reid supports this contention by referring to Pope Pius' encyclical letter *Vigilante Cura* of 1936. *Catholics*, p.13

⁹² Nicholas Reid, 'Letter', p. 101

⁹³ Nicholas Reid, 'Letter', p. 92; 96-8;

patronising views about the incapacity of the cinema-going masses to judge films. 'In order to be a 'Really Alive Film Critic', he declared sarcastically, 'Rule #1' was

always remember that a really good film cannot be popular. Since the masses are ignorant and coarse and have limited responses, a successful film must be flawed in some way perceptible only to the eye of a R.A.F.C. Popularity is *a priori* evidence of shallowness.⁹⁴

Reid's willingness to embrace vernacular culture, to praise its features he enjoyed or admired, heedless of their lowly ranking on a cultural hierarchy, can be seen in his *Star* reviews of Hollywood films. It illustrated the postwar trend towards the reception of American films, and American popular culture itself, in New Zealand. Although both the cinema and the culture remained targets of political and cultural criticism, both were gaining increasing recognition that they contained artistic merit. In one of his first columns, Reid established a simple template for what constituted a good film.

The best films are well-made, well-acted with something above and beyond formulas, whose values are not falsely simplified, whose characters are not stereotypes. Instead of supplying time-killing dope, they give intellectual stimulus and healthy relaxation.⁹⁵

Reid's new approach thus accepted that cinema was more than a narcotic for the masses, and that its audiences were capable of responding selectively and even discerningly. Reid's *Star* reviews reveal that he had now assumed the local movie audience required no explanation for technical terms such as 'montage' and 'deep-focus', that they were capable of distinguishing between the directorial styles of, say, Hitchcock and Capra, and that they understood cinematic use of religious symbolism and mythical archetypes.

By the mid-fifties Reid was willing to recognise, even enjoy, the sheer entertainment value of much of American cinema, for all that it was frequently frivolous, undemanding and lacking intellectual gravitas. He often adopted a humorous rather than a sententious register to convey his feelings about Hollywood excesses. For example, he remarked of *The Private War of Major Benson* 'It sounds pretty gruesome, doesn't it – the Army, nuns and children all at once in an American film'.⁹⁶ But Reid could still be derisive about Hollywood. *Duel in the Sun* was condemned as 'a mass of festering corn ... combining barbarity with baloney'.⁹⁷ Other films were dismissed for their 'American sentimentality' or

⁹⁴ 'How To Be a Really Alive Film Critic', *Monthly Bulletin Wellington Film Society*, 15 September 1950, p.6

⁹⁵ *Star*, 4 January 1955, p.2 This is a more lucid definition than the one he supplied in 1948-9, in which a 'good film' was defined as 'technically satisfying... with a recreative quality, honest in its presentation of its theme, be it realistic or otherwise, telling its tale in terms of cinema, affording genuine emotional stimulus either to a group or to a large number of people, and with its basic values in a condition of health'. Reid, *Catholics*, p.43

⁹⁶ *Star*, 21 April 1956, p.3; 15 May 1956, p.3

⁹⁷ *Star*, 12 March 1955, p.2

praised for their lack of 'Hollywood slickness'.⁹⁸ 'Hollywood films', he informed readers in 1956, were 'rarely remarkable for their good taste'.⁹⁹

Yet Reid's new attitude to Hollywood included an acknowledgement that there was much to admire. He praised 'the dream-factory's high average' in action films¹⁰⁰ and commended some recent westerns for their willingness to revise traditional stereotypes of that genre.

Hondo is in line with modern trends in the superior western, the Indian point of view is seen sympathetically. There is more than a suggestion that the white man was to blame for the later Indian risings.... *Hondo's* regret at the passing of the Indian way of life would have been unthinkable in the days of Tom Mix and Hoot Gibson.¹⁰¹

Reid also commented positively on the technical proficiencies to be found in many American films, especially those by directors who were now finding favour in the pages of *Cahiers du Cinema*. Thus Stanley Donen was commended for his exploitation of the new wide-screen format to enhance grouping and movement of the huge principal cast in *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*.¹⁰² Elia Kazan earned approval for his 'cinematic mastery' in *East of Eden*; Reid admired the director's visual approach and use of subjective camera angles to convey emotions.¹⁰³ He described another *Cahiers* favourite, Nicholas Ray, as possessing a gift for the 'imaginative arrangement of dramatic action' which could 'spark ... banal material into poetry'.¹⁰⁴

Another feature of fifties-era Hollywood cinema that Reid admired was the willingness of some of its films to explore serious issues. He complimented some low-budget 'B' films for their focus on exposing corruption within various American social institutions, including, in the case of *The Big Knife*, Hollywood itself. Reid enthused over that film's 'broad, black strokes', describing it as a 'venomous exposure of Hollywood's peritonitis of the soul'. He observed of the prison dramas *Caged* and *Unchained* that they possessed 'a certain rough integrity', and that 'parts of them will appeal to the action-seekers, but as illustrations of the right and wrong ways to rehabilitate criminals they have interest for the more serious customers'.¹⁰⁵ He approved of U.S. films which attempted meaningful political or existential comment, such as *Bad Day at Black Rock*, which 'says

⁹⁸ *Star*, 26 February 1955, p.2; 29 January 1955, p.1

⁹⁹ *Star*, 28 January 1956, p.3

¹⁰⁰ *Star*, 21 May 1955, p.2

¹⁰¹ *Star*, 12 May 1955, p. 2

¹⁰² *Star*, 4 June 1955, p.2

¹⁰³ *Star*, 8 October 1955, p.2

¹⁰⁴ *Star*, 14 July 1956, p.3

¹⁰⁵ *Star*, 1 December 1956, p.3; 24 September 1955, p.2

something important about the meaning of citizenship in a democracy, and about moral responsibility'. *On the Waterfront* was, he argued, transcended its origins in the thriller, melodrama and sociological exposure genres to become 'a study in human dignity and the integrity of man', possessing 'a depth few social films have'. For Reid, this film ultimately became a religious experience in which 'the battered, bruised and bloody face of Brando suggest[ed] the face of Christ in medieval Pietas'.¹⁰⁶ Within seven years, then, Reid had moved from condemning American cinema as essentially the antithesis of religion and art, to an acceptance that some Hollywood cinema was capable of expressing profound religious and artistic insights.

This positive attitude towards American cinema of the mid-fifties was paralleled by Reid's increasingly negative assessment of British film. In 1948 he had maintained that 'the hope of the screen' depended, not on the homogenous product of gigantic American studios with their commercial insistence on giving the public what it wanted, but on 'the more elastic and individual British studios which have Carol Reed, Anthony Asquith, David Lean ...and a few others with Hollywood minds'.¹⁰⁷ British cinema was also distinguished from Hollywood by its supremacy in the art of documentary film; indeed, he claimed, American cinema was now incorporating some of these documentary techniques into some of its recent films.¹⁰⁸ But by 1951 he was writing about 'The Decline and Fall of the British Film Empire', a title which elided the erosion of British cultural along with its strategic influence. Once, he maintained, British films had represented 'sincerity and artistry'; now they were merely a 'pretentious and vulgar attempt to do what Hollywood should have been left to do'.¹⁰⁹ By 1955 Reid was convinced that British cinema, was now inferior to its Hollywood counterpart. He wrote of 'the apparent decline of the British film', comparing it adversely with that of the United States.

[D]uring 1955 many British movies showed increasing Americanization in style, and too many others were filmed versions of stage farces or tired repetitions of war-time formulas.... The British industry needs a shot in the arm to restore it to some of its earlier vitality and originality. The United States, on the other hand, while providing the usual package of mediocre westerns, Marilyn Monroe, soap-opera dramas, Martin-and-Lewis inanities, crime sagas and Marilyn Monroe, is devoting more attention to meaningful themes. "On the Waterfront", "The Country Girl", "The Blackboard Jungle", "The Shrike" and "East of Eden", although not all first-class cinema, are genuinely serious films.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ *Star*, 30 July 1955, p.2; 19 March 1955, p.2

¹⁰⁷ *Catholics*, p.11

¹⁰⁸ *Catholics*, p.12

¹⁰⁹ 'The Decline and Fall of the British Film Empire', *Monthly Film Bulletin of the Wellington Film Society*, 14 April 1951, pp.11-12

¹¹⁰ *Star*, 7 January 1956, p.6

This comparison constitutes a reversal of Reid's stance seven years earlier. He now perceived British cinema as hackneyed, conservative and homogenous, whereas the best of Hollywood had a moral and social seriousness, a heterogeneity and a technical proficiency that Britain could not match. America, rather than Britain, now provided the cinematic exemplars.

VII

The first New Zealand-made feature film in thirty years, the 1952 *Broken Barrier*, provides further evidence that Hollywood movies were increasingly being recognised by some New Zealand intellectuals for their willingness to confront social issues. As Barbara Brookes has demonstrated, *Broken Barrier* was 'in part an outgrowth of a genre of "social problem" film-making dominating Hollywood in the late 1940s'.¹¹¹ Brookes places the 1952 film within a wider context: the 'international genre of "social problem" theatre and filmmaking.... Through *Broken Barrier* we can see how these concerns became localized and how New Zealand material is made to speak to the international concerns of the genre'.¹¹² She shows how the film's director and producer, John O' Shea and Roger Mirams,¹¹³ were well aware of recent Hollywood movies about racism, namely *Home of the Brave*, *Lost Boundaries* and *Pinky*. The pair also appreciated that this particular American genre had achieved both box-office and critical success both overseas and in New Zealand.¹¹⁴ Their pragmatic acceptance that social and artistic value could arise from popular Hollywood entertainment not only endorsed the attitudes of Pocock, Joseph and Reid. It also reveals that O'Shea and Roger Mirams followed the example of postwar New Zealand musicians in their willingness to appropriate American cultural sources and adapt them for consumption by local audiences.

Broken Barrier utilises the *Gentleman's Agreement* device of using a journalist as its hero.¹¹⁵ As Brookes points out, *Broken Barrier* borrows extensively from *Pinky*, another

¹¹¹ Barbara Brookes, 'Which Barrier Was Broken? *Broken Barrier* and the New Zealand Cinema in the 1950s', *New Zealand Journal of History*, Vol.44 No.2, 2010, pp.121-133. Prof. Brookes generously provided me with a draft of this article several months before it was published.

¹¹² Brookes, 'Which Barrier', p.123

¹¹³ Brother of Gordon Mirams

¹¹⁴ Brookes, 'Which Barrier', p.122

¹¹⁵ I am grateful to Prof. Brookes for drawing this aspect of *Broken Barrier* to my attention. Does this journalist motif owe anything to *Citizen Kane*, where the reporter Jeremy Thompson seeks the identity of Rosebud?

Hollywood ‘problem’ film. It adapts *Pinky*’s crucial device of using the motif of intermarriage to frame a cinematic discussion of race relations. *Broken Barrier* also appropriates *Pinky*’s plot about a young woman of mixed race who is sent away from her rural environment to an urban and predominantly white society to become a nurse, arousing the concerns of her mother. The New Zealand film also adopts another key plot and thematic element of *Pinky*: the implications of inter-racial romance. Both films, Brookes argues, used ‘[t]ransgressive romance’, to effect social critique.¹¹⁶ However, unlike *Pinky*, the inter-racial romance in *Broken Barrier* has a conventional happy conclusion. Tom the Pakeha and the inter-racial Rawiri will apparently marry and live in the rural Maori settlement of Mahia. This, of course, could be received as a typically sentimental Hollywood ending, but ironically it is one which the Hollywood movie eschews.

Broken Barrier reveals the influence that American film had on those New Zealanders who wanted to produce film as well as consume it. Both its producers acknowledged and utilised the very commercialism of Hollywood genre cinema that Gordon Mirams, Scott and others disdained. They looked beyond this superficial gloss and realized that it concealed meaningful and serious comment on contentious contemporary issues. The bitter implications of New Zealand racist attitudes could be sweetened with the syrup of an entertaining romance. Their inclusion of a social and moral critique also aligned them with the Mirams-Scott insistence that cinema must be a vehicle of social criticism.¹¹⁷

Broken Barrier also represented a link to another characteristic of New Zealand responses to American culture. Its hero is a journalist researching stories about Maori for a magazine specifically identified as American –probably *Life* or *Time*. The crucial shift in the film’s plot occurs when Rawiri leaves Tom after discovering that he is writing about ‘Savage Maori and Cannibalism’. Only when he rejects and leaves his American employer does she reconcile with him. American media is thus represented in the film as villainous, threatening a closer understanding between races in New Zealand as well as endangering young love. Its pernicious influence must be recognised and renounced before Rawiri and Tom can return to the rural Eden of Mahia. In using an American magazine as a symbol of a culturally, morally and socially corrosive culture, the makers of *Broken Barrier* deployed one of the most potent and significant New Zealand responses to both Hollywood movies and American culture. They were both perceived as insidiously corrupting influences on the

¹¹⁶ Brookes, ‘Which Barrier’, pp.126-7

¹¹⁷ As Brookes notes, the film censor himself had alerted his brother to UNESCO’s interest in encouraging films about race relations. Brookes, ‘Which Barrier’, p.124

social and moral values of other societies. Yet the film also co-opts several vintage Hollywood tropes. These include the hero's love of a good woman becoming the catalyst for his personal redemption. Another such theme is the Arcadian mythology of a couple's decision to reject the city /civilisation in favour of a return to a perceived simpler communal lifestyle in touch with nature. The New Zealand film also appears to be indebted to John Ford. After the war several of Ford's films reveal an interest in inter-racial issues. Not only was Ford the original director of *Pinky* (he was fired after a week); his well-received cavalry westerns of the late 1940s-early 1950s such as *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* showed an indirect but newly sympathetic attitude towards the deleterious impact of white settler expansion on Indian lifestyle on the western frontier.¹¹⁸ In this Fordian sense, *Mahia* in *Broken Barrier* is revealed as on the cusp of the mid-twentieth New Zealand frontier.

Broken Barrier is a valuable cultural artifact for historians of New Zealand's mid-century. It constitutes the era's sole form of evidence in the form of indigenous feature film. It also demonstrates that in cinema, as in music, New Zealanders were not passive recipients of American culture. The film shows how O'Shea and Roger Mirams appropriated an American cinematic genre popular with both audiences and critics of the time, and adapted it to comment on specifically New Zealand issues. They also incorporated several themes and plot devices typical of Hollywood movies. In turn they deployed these American cultural features to criticise what both men regarded as a reprehensible feature of American culture and society. The artifacts of an American cultural industry became the instruments by which New Zealanders could criticise American society and culture.

VIII

Broken Barriers and Reid's film criticism reveal the binary character of New Zealand responses to Hollywood film during the 1950s. The approaches of O'Shea and Roger Mirams, along with Reid's evolving critical perspective represented a more inclusive and accommodating response towards American cinema. Dominant within this strand were several key elements, of which a fascination for film style and technique, and an insistence on the directorial thematic and stylistic signature were fundamental. Other features included an awareness that American cinema contained work of aesthetic value, capable of conveying

¹¹⁸ Four years after *Broken Barriers* Ford would fully explore inter-racial relationships in his masterpiece *The Searchers*. He would return to this theme within the western setting with *Sergeant Rutledge* and *Cheyenne Autumn*.

moral, social and artistic awareness. There was also an acceptance that American films appealed to a local audience that, far from having uniform tastes and expectations, possessed an evolving, heterogeneous range of cinematic preferences and made selective judgements.

Whereas this strand either anticipated or aligned itself with the innovatory *Cahiers* attitude towards Hollywood films, the other strand continued its traditional approach towards that cinema. In this mindset, only rarely could an American film escape from the confining gravitational pull of commercialism and achieve the more liberating artistic orbit of European cinema. Assessments of Hollywood remained grounded in left-wing precepts about culture and commodity capitalism. They denigrated the critical and intellectual capacity of the audience for American films, and maintained a depression-era credo that assessed cinematic merit in essentially sociological terms. Such critiques also focused on Hollywood cinema as the key agent for American cultural imperialism. By the early 1950s, their habitual perception of American cinema as inherently meretricious had been reinforced by the ideological impact of contemporary political events, such as McCarthyism, the Cold War and the Korean War. Adherents of this viewpoint regarded Hollywood movies as essentially manipulative and repressive, and interpreted their New Zealand audience's enthusiasm for these films as proof of a credulous and unthinking public that required cultural guidance from their intellectual superiors. They relied on an intrinsically functional approach, focusing on allegations of Hollywood's pernicious and diversionary social, cultural and economic impact on New Zealanders. Of this group, only Gordon Mirams had the perspicacity to see American films as performing a ritualistic role, in that their local reception helped build a community and cultural identities, although these identities were ones that his political views prevented him from endorsing.

The functional stance remained popular with the left throughout the postwar decade. Its dominance, however, was gradually usurped during this era by another response, represented by the likes of Pocock, Joseph and, eventually, Reid. Their view of American movies was essentially structural and textual, for they were less interested in the sociological implications and consequences of such films, preferring instead to interpret many of them as artistic texts permeated with rich structural, technical and thematic values. They admired the innovative ways in which some American filmmakers subverted and confounded their industry's standardised cinematic process. For such New Zealanders the very best American

films were artistic comets, whose imaginative and technical brilliance illuminated the sombre world of postwar cinema.¹¹⁹

An analysis of reactions to Hollywood films in the post-1944 decades also illuminates several facets of New Zealand's social, cultural and intellectual life. Embedded deep within the negative evaluations of American cinema was a fundamental anxiety about modern technology and its public reception. Many of those belonging to New Zealand educational, civic and intellectual elects perceived this tremendously popular medium as a threat to their role as cultural arbiters. They were determined that the popular reception of cinema must be mediated and regulated by them or their surrogates in the form of cultural import controls such as censorship, quotas and even proscription. They justified this stance by claiming that American films were agents of cultural imperialism, the carriers of cultural and social infection, spreading noxious American values and behaviours, especially amongst susceptible youth.

The gradual postwar emergence within New Zealand of a new critique of Hollywood cinema, one that elevated American films over those from Britain, carried significant resonances. It suggested the erosion of perceived British cultural supremacy over the U.S.A., a possibility that carried wider implications extending to areas such as defence and strategy. Other certainties were being questioned as well. The critical assumption that so-called European art cinema ranked above American popular cinema on an artistic hierarchy was now being rejected by some New Zealand intellectuals, as was the idea of a high-low cultural dichotomy. So was the old notion that because Hollywood was a site of industry and commodification, it must therefore be artistically inferior.

That critical yardstick of the Mirams era, evaluation of film primarily as a sociological document, was being replaced by an emerging focus on cinematic style and technique. The once dominant insistence on the contrast between the commercial and formulaic features of Hollywood and a European 'art' cinema that was somehow free of these institutional and economic constraints was in some quarters under attack from those who were coming to regard some American films as inventive, spectacular and insightful.¹²⁰ This new paradigm in turn led to a more positive assessment of Hollywood cinema, again at the expense of Pinewood. The trope of the passive and undemanding audience, stupefied by

¹¹⁹ I have adapted, and applied to a different context, some of the terminology used by Raphaëlle Moine, in her discussion of world cinema genre classification in *Cinema Genre* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008, trans. A. Fox & H. Radner), *passim*

¹²⁰ I have freely adapted and extended some terminology used in Raphael Moine's critique of genre cinema in *Cinema Genre* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), *passim*

images of American glamour and materialism, was also gradually being rejected except for those on the left. This perception was increasingly replaced by an acceptance that New Zealand filmgoers were selective in their viewing and capable of showing an intelligent understanding of the various dramatic, moral and social issues that some Hollywood films depicted.

Most of these elements that characterise post-1944 responses to American film are also to be found in reactions to those other conveyers of American popular culture, comics and music. Here we find the same fears about twentieth century American media and technology, as well as the appropriation and exploitation of such fears by various civic and cultural groups. Here too can be found the same concern about New Zealand being overwhelmed by the alien 'Other': American popular culture, construed as morally corrosive and socially pernicious, and damaging to 'British' values. These adverse attitudes towards American film were not frozen in place. The reception of Hollywood cinema during the postwar decade became warmer, and many of the hostile postures thawed. While some key figures on the left and in educational and intellectual circles remained hostile to a cinema that epitomised a culture they essentialised as lacking redeeming merit, others adopted a more discriminating approach. They admired Hollywood's vigour, brashness, and innovatory spirit. The emergence of this new spirit can be detected for example in some postwar movie reviews in *Canta*. By 1953 commercially successful U.S. films like *Viva Zapata* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* are being praised alongside the works of Jean Renoir and Vittorio de Sica.¹²¹

New Zealanders approached American cinema as they did American culture and indeed America itself, with a Janus-like perspective. They saw not just America but also the images and symbols of America. They were responding to a 'double America', an America which contained and disseminated both the disease and antidote, to use Alessandro Portelli's metaphor.¹²² There was the America of McCarthy, the Ku Klux Klan and the Hollywood that produced tedious and banal films. And there was the America of Jonas Salk, William Faulkner and the Hollywood that produced the masterful cinema of Ford, Hitchcock and Welles. An admiration of *Wagonmaster* did not mean an endorsement of the witch-hunts of the early 1950s, just as a love of rock 'n' roll did not denote support for America's military

¹²¹ *Canta*, 6 August 1953, p.6

¹²² Alessandro Portelli, 'The Transatlantic Jeremiad: American Mass Culture and Counterculture and Opposition Culture in Italy' in Rob Kroes, et al, eds, *Cultural Transmissions and Receptions: American Mass Culture in Europe* (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1993), pp.130; p.131

expansion during the Cold War. This double-edged reaction helps explain the love-hate relationship of New Zealanders with the U.S.A. in the postwar era. Their response to America and its culture was bifurcated, selective and discriminating: they endorsed certain features of double America's culture and society; they deplored or rejected others. Within New Zealand, American cinema, like America itself, was perceived as a source of pestilence at the same time as it was regarded as a wellspring of invigoration and inspiration.

CHAPTER NINE

NEW ZEALAND EDITORIAL CARTOONS: A CLOSE READING OF SOME CARTOONISTS' RESPONSES TO ASPECTS OF AMERICAN CULTURE IN THE IMMEDIATE POSTWAR PERIOD

I

This chapter approaches editorial cartoons as a crucial medium through which some New Zealanders received, evaluated and contested American culture. It investigates a range of cartoons from the immediate postwar era. They have been selected because their artists appropriated textual and visual signifiers from this 'travelling culture' in order to comment not only on that culture, but also on the culture, politics and society of New Zealand itself.¹ By subjecting these elements to a close reading, I aim to provide a more nuanced understanding of how an influential group of postwar New Zealand artists reacted to what many commentators and critics have long regarded as a pervasive and invasive global culture.

Editorial cartoons in newspapers and periodicals are an invaluable but frequently overlooked resource for the historian. As an historian of *Punch* magazine pointed out a century ago, such cartoons are 'contemporary history for the use and information of future generations cast into amusing form for the entertainment of the present.'² Cartoons provide a visual commentary on their times. They reflect public opinion at a given moment. On particular issues they enable insights into the contemporary social, cultural and intellectual climate. The term 'cartoon' originally meant a quick preparatory outline for a painting. Cartoons in their modern journalistic format remain a sketch intended to capture vividly the essential forms of their subject. Consequently, as Thomas Kemnitz observed, an editorial cartoon's great strength is that it 'conveys its message quickly and pungently. Thus the cartoon is more likely to get its point across than any other printed means of communication.'³ Editorial cartoons also offer visual comment, usually in a humorous or satirical manner, on contemporary issues and personalities. Their creators' attitudes and prejudices are frequently exposed, bereft of the concealment that the chiaroscuro of words

¹ The term is James Clifford's, used in his *Travel and Translation in the Late-Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997)

² M.H. Spielmann, *Cartoons From "Punch"* (London: 1906) Vol.I, p.v, cited in Thomas Kemnitz, 'The Cartoon As Historical Source', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol.4, No.1 (Summer 1973), p.81

³ Kemnitz, *Cartoons*, p.84

can provide. Furthermore, a cartoon's artwork and authorial stance enables insights into contemporary perspectives about controversies and personalities. As Spielmann points out, cartoons constitute 'the record of how public matters struck a people ...at the instant of their happening'.⁴

More importantly, the layers of graphical and textual references and signifiers embedded within the editorial cartoon provide historians with invaluable contextual clues, enriching their understanding of the cartoon's subject-matter and of the contemporary responses that it invoked. Cartoons function as cultural seismographs, recording and measuring responses to cultural shifts that frequently occur at a distant and subterranean level. Yet New Zealand historians have, until recently, neglected cartoons as instruments of cultural calibration. The medium lacks the gravitas of the parliamentary record, economic statistics, or judicial decisions. As graphic texts, cartoons have suffered for decades, both overseas and in New Zealand, from what Warren Feeney has identified as 'modernist notions of illustration as a lesser art form'.⁵ Their creators sometimes worked as commercial artists, impairing their dignity as 'true' artists.⁶ Cartoons' reliance on humour and satire handicap them as reputable sources of historical evidence in the minds of those historians who fail to utilise humour as an 'important and revealing facet of society'.⁷ Cartoonists' use of slang and puns, their manipulation of contemporary social, racial and political stereotypes, and their frequent caricaturing of physical and personal attributes of public figures appear uncouth and vulgar compared with the more dignified and discreet registers of committee reports or ministerial announcements. And of course Ross Harvey's warning about the evidentiary reliability of newspapers, with their tendency to manufacture their own historical myths, also applies to their editorial cartoons.⁸ It is almost impossible to determine the extent to which the bias of editor and newspaper may have influenced or forced the cartoonist's stance.

The virtues that distinguish cartoons as historical resources, such as their pungency, wit, visual impact and insights into popular perceptions, enable crucial insights into twentieth century New Zealand history. A survey of the work of newspaper and periodical

⁴ Spielmann, *Cartoons From Punch*, cited Kemnitz, p.81

⁵ Warren Feeney, 'The Selling of Rita', review of Te Papa's Rita Angus: Life and Vision Exhibition, 2008, in *The Press*, 16 July 2008, pp. D1-D2

⁶ Feeney, p.D1

⁷ Kemnitz, *Cartoons as Historical Source*, p.83

⁸ Ross Harvey, 'Newspapers,' in Penny Griffith et al, eds, *Book & Print in New Zealand: A Guide to Print Culture in Aotearoa*, (Wellington: Victoria University Press 1997), p. 128.

cartoonists during the decade after 1945 illuminates facets of our society, politics and culture that have for too long been overlooked.

II

During a debate in the House of Representatives in 1950, the Grey Lynn Labour MP Fred Hackett displayed a cartoon which he described as ‘anti-British and pro-American’, declaring, ‘I do not think anti-British cartoons such as the one I have in my hand should be allowed to appear in our papers’.⁹ Hackett’s outburst shows that politicians were cognisant of a significant feature of many New Zealand cartoons of that era: their references to America and American culture. Their artists identified and appropriated three overarching features. The first consisted of cognates of American national identity, such as the Statue of Liberty and Uncle Sam. The second, more specific element involved references to contemporary Americans and American cultural issues, such as McCarthyism and juvenile delinquency. The most significant strand involved the ways in which some cartoonists exploited the lexicon of American cultural discourse, with its visual, oral, musical and textual vocabularies. These extended from Broadway musicals, and popular songs and dances to movies, slang and consumer goods and lifestyle fashions. They became, in Rob Kroes’ words, ‘an international iconographic language, a visual lingua franca’,¹⁰ but re-configured into a New Zealand context, examining aspects of our political, social and cultural life. One key feature exemplifies these cartoonists’ graphical and verbal manipulation of all three strands: their reflexive manipulation of American cultural references in order to respond to the very culture that produced the discourses and symbols which they were appropriating and evaluating. The New Zealand cartoonists whose work I examine did not reference American culture –cowboys, the Statue of Liberty, gangsters – merely as superficial visual shorthand. Their use of such symbols was more profound and subtle. They rearticulated cultural signs in order to critique New Zealand and New Zealanders. These cartoons provide further proof that New Zealand reactions to American culture involved a self-conscious and adaptive process of reception.

⁹ NZPD Vol. 290 (1950), p.2045

¹⁰ The term is used by Rob Kroes in his paper, “American Empire and Cultural Imperialism: a View From the Receiving End”, Paper presented to the Conference of the German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C., March 25-27, 1999 on *The American Impact on Western Europe: Americanization and Westernization in Transatlantic Perspective*, p. 8, although he restricts its description to visual features of American culture.

One frequently invoked American symbol was the Statue of Liberty. This had often featured in American popular media disseminated in New Zealand since at least 1917-8, when Charles Chaplin used it ironically in *The Immigrant*. Thereafter New Zealanders could see this icon, usually employed as an establishing shot, in countless Hollywood movies. In the popular 1942 Hitchcock movie *Saboteur* it was the location of the film's gripping climax. In the forties and fifties, illustrations of the icon, often under attack by aliens, appeared on the covers of pulps.¹¹ During the immediate postwar years, several New Zealand cartoonists employed this cultural referent to comment, both positively and negatively, on America and its society. Sid Scales' *Statue of Liberty*,¹²

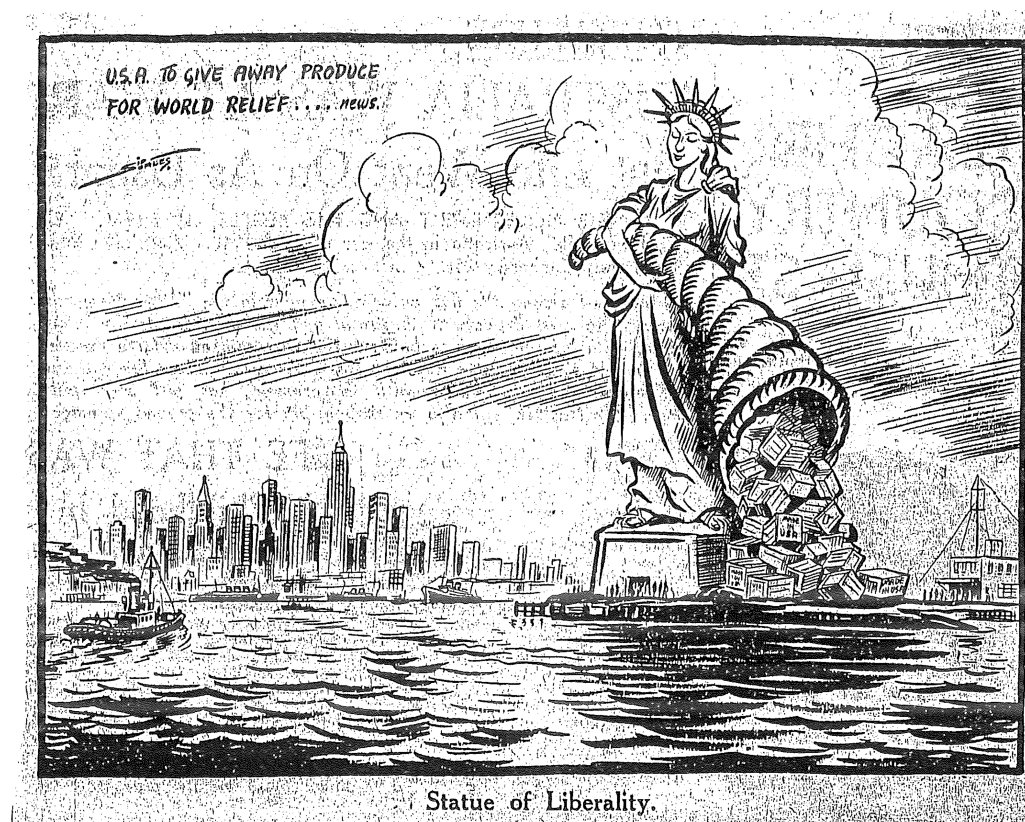


Figure 12 The American Cornucopia

¹¹ 'The Statue of Liberty in Popular Culture', <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statue-of-Liberty-in-Popular-Culture>, accessed 8 February 2009. Chaplin used the Statue twice as director: in *The Immigrant* and forty years later in *A King in New York*, during the height of the McCarthy witch-hunts.. Both references were ironic; both drew adverse comment, especially the second. Its most famous use prior to 1956 was in the 1942 film *Saboteur*, by another British-born director turned American citizen, Alfred Hitchcock. In the film's climax, two men fight at the top of the statue.

¹² *Statue of Liberty* cartoon, clipping from undated and unsorted miscellany of Otago Daily Times cartoons, New Zealand Cartoon Archives, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. Its subject matter and location in the miscellany suggests a date of late 1940s-early 1950s.

while referring to Truman era Marshall aid schemes, used the Statue in its customary trope as viewed by Americans themselves: the U.S.A. as a perceived symbol of liberty and source of hope for mankind. However, Scales extended this interpretation, portraying America as the generous benefactor of mankind, pouring forth a cornucopia of material culture for the entire world. In his interpretation, the Statue has quasi-religious overtones - Liberty as a benevolent Madonna figure. America thus becomes the embodiment of compassion and generosity.

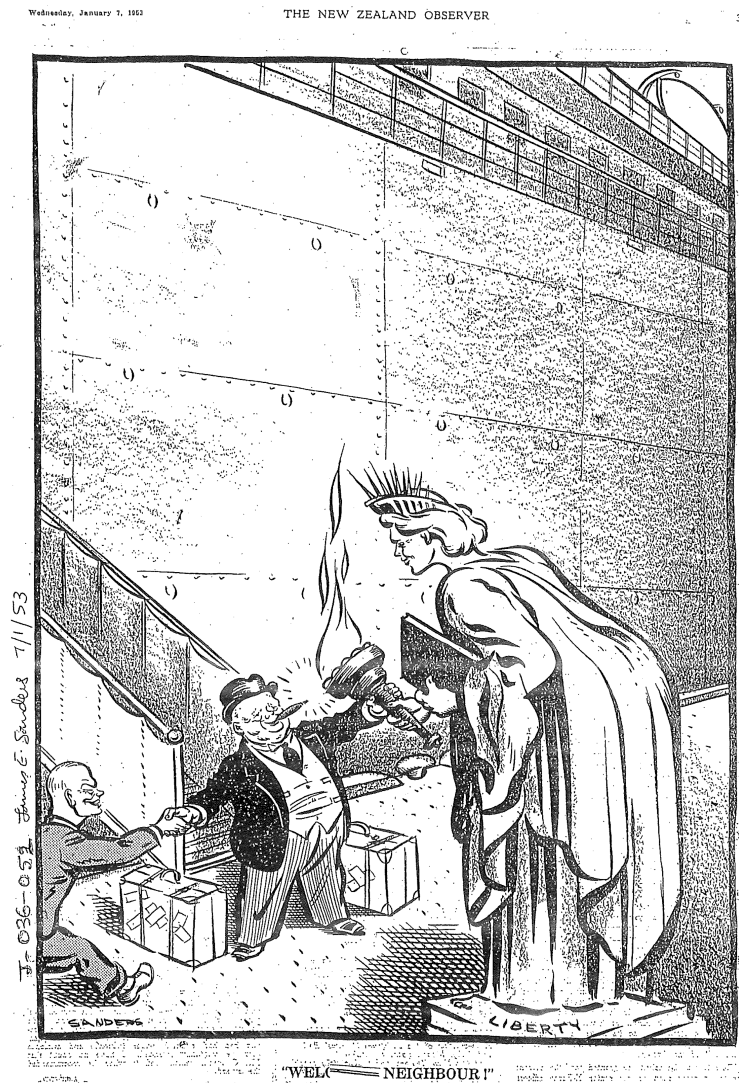


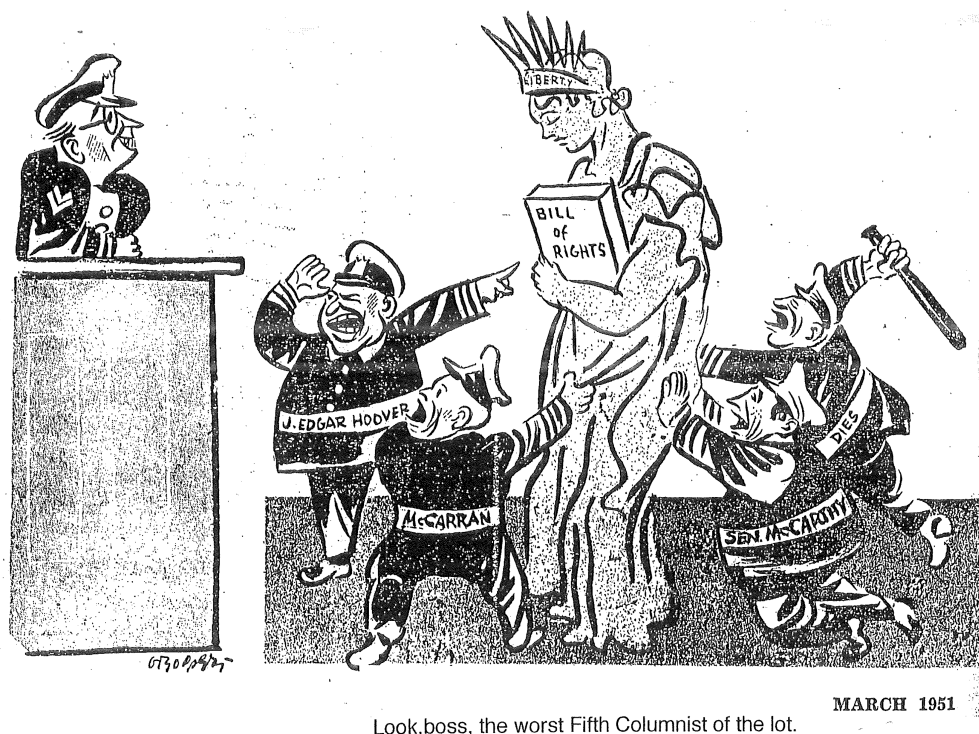
Figure 13 Welcome Neighbour! ¹³

Another cartoon from the same period, James Sanders' *Welcome, Neighbour!* was drawn some months after New Zealand joined the ANZUS pact, a strategic defence agreement that significantly omitted Britain, New Zealand's traditional military guardian. It

¹³ *New Zealand Observer*, 7 January 1953, p.3. Cartoon Archives, Turnbull Library, J-036-052

also depicts the Statue of Liberty as a cultural icon, this time in a graciously regal guise, along with an unidentified President Eisenhower, welcoming British Prime Minister Churchill to America in 1953. Sanders drew Churchill as holding onto the torch held outstretched in Liberty's welcoming hand. The visual effect is of transference, from the older leader/nation to the younger nation, represented as powerful and gracious by virtue of the size and dignity the cartoonist has given her in his graphical rendition. America has taken over western leadership and mentorship from Britain, a transition with great strategic and sentimental significance for New Zealand.

Cartoonists also invoked the Statue to comment adversely on America. One such example was published at the height of McCarthyism in *Here & Now*, a 'progressive' New Zealand journal of politics and the arts.¹⁴ Here Liberty is not portrayed as a serene and imposing figure. Instead, clutching the Bill of Rights, she is drawn with head bowed, surrounded and jostled by strident, vicious policemen, one armed with a truncheon, who drag her before their "Boss" to accuse her of being 'the worst Fifth Columnist of the lot!' The religious overtones of the cartoon - Liberty as Christ dragged before Pontius Pilate - added a layer of depth to the condemnation. Whereas *Spirit of Liberality* presents an overwhelmingly positive view of America, the *Here & Now* cartoon's perspective was



Look, boss, the worst Fifth Columnist of the lot.

Figure 14 Liberty Endangered

¹⁴ *Here & Now*, March 1951, p.8

pessimistic and critical. It depicts an America in which Liberty is endangered, bullied and victimised by men representing the very institutions and agencies of the American government and legislature, such as the FBI and Congress, that are supposed to protect her. Their dark uniforms, accusing gestures, menacing appearances and use of force, are strongly reminiscent of frames from a *film noir* or an illustration in a crime pulp magazine. They constitute an image of a bleakly repressive America, far removed from the beneficent, cheerful icons depicted by Scales and Sanders. The *Fifth Columnist* cartoon appeared in a limited circulation journal of the arts and politics, not a large circulation metropolitan newspaper. It relied for its impact on its presumably well-educated readers' awareness of the current personalities and features of American politics and government. These included the significance of the Bill of the Rights and the meaning of the term 'Fifth Columnist', as well as an awareness of both McCarthyism and the governmental and legislative roles of Hoover, McCarran and Dies in the House Un-American Activities Committee, the Senate and the Internal Security Act.¹⁵

Two other emblems of national identity, Britannia and Americana, are used in James Sanders' cartoon, *Rule, Americana!* in order to comment not only on New Zealand perceptions of America and its culture, but also on the changing postwar roles of Britain and America *vis-à-vis* New Zealand. Ostensibly referring to Anglo-American NATO military command issue of the early 1950s, it suggests that for postwar New Zealand, America had taken over Britain's former role as protector and mentor. *Britannia* had been superseded by *Americana*, symbolised by Churchill placing Britannia's helmet on America. Just as Britain is geologically tilting westwards towards the U.S.A. according to the cited news item, so hegemonic and strategic power has inclined across the Atlantic. Sanders depicted *Americana*

¹⁵ Mari Jo Buhle et al, eds, *Encyclopedia of the American Left* (New York: Garland Publishing Co, 1997, pp.334-6; 'The Red Scare', *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 46, No.18, 1999, in <<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/313>> accessed 23 July 2008



Figure 15 The New, Svelte, Hegemonic Power ¹⁶

as a creature of that society's leisure culture. She has a svelte figure, wears sunglasses, that crucial fashion accessory, and carries with her the military trident and shield (which resembles a surf-board) but also 'candy', 'comics' and a beach toy. This is a youthful figure out for fun and pleasure, a contrast with the bemused, older, matronly Britannia of the cartoon. Sanders depiction of Americana's cultural accessories questions whether the U.S.A. possessed the maturity and determination to carry the burden of Britannia's former role. This is the German director Wim Wender's 1980s concept of 'the American friend': powerful, but unreliable and untrustworthy because its shallow, frivolous culture sapped its will and determination.¹⁷

Postwar cartoonists such as Sanders not only manipulated the signs and texts of American culture to comment on that nation's strategic and symbolic role in the world. They also used them to comment, sometimes critically, on New Zealand politics. A *People's Voice* cartoonist, 'F.S.D.' combined contemporary American and New Zealand referents to

¹⁶ *New Zealand Observer*, 30 January 1952, p.3 Cartoon Archives, Turnbull Library, J-036-005

¹⁷ Wenders uses the phrase as the title for one of his movies investigating this theme.

powerful effect in the 1948 cartoon 'Captain Crook Discovers New Zealand'.¹⁸ The cartoon employs a pro-British affectation, even apparently endorsing British capitalist financial and trade policies, in order to condemn American cultural and economic exploitation of New Zealand. an American vessel bearing a dollar sign has replaced James Cook's iconic British ship 'Endeavour'. America is also identified as inveigling Maori / New Zealanders, two of them identifiable as Fraser and Nash, out of their precious greenstone, which signified the British economic heritage in the forms of the 'Sterling Bloc' and 'Empire Preference'. The cartoonist also depicts U.S. cultural artifacts as the insidious instruments of American economic hegemony. The 'gifts' proffered by the Americans are all emblematic of American consumerist culture: 'Films', 'Readers' Digest', 'gum', 'candy' and 'nylons'. In this cartoon, American references are combined with allusion to British history in order to condemn America in a global as well as a local context.

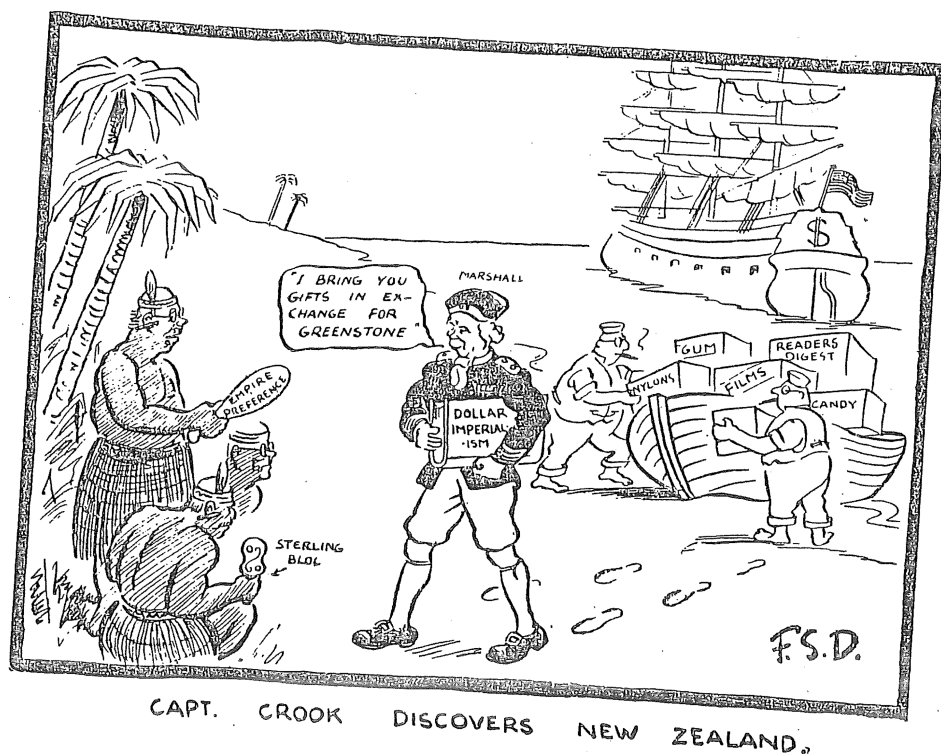


Figure 16 America as 'Captain Crook'

A more sophisticated example of the appropriation of American cultural symbols to comment on postwar New Zealand politics and society can be seen in two 1946 'double-

¹⁸ *Peoples' Voice*, 16 April 1948, p.1

spread' comic-strip style cartoons drawn by Sid Scales, the *Otago Daily Times*' cartoonist. This relocation occurs within two American comic-strip formats, both braiding text and image and incorporating panels, speech bubbles and captions. The first, inspired by a recent news report on an American Senator's suggestion that the constituent parts of the United Kingdom be incorporated into the United States, Scales imagined a logical outcome of this scenario. Would New Zealand become another state of the union by adopting American political, social, cultural and linguistic mores? Any real understanding of the cartoon again depended on its New Zealand readership identifying those mores and their ironic, even sarcastic juxtaposition within the local context.

Linguistic signifiers of American popular culture abound in this elaborate cartoon-strip. The 'Enzed family' became the 'Enzee Gang'. American idioms appeared to be taking over the New Zealand vocabulary as the slang terms were applied to a range of social, familial and even political contexts: Nash, accused by National of taxing excessively, contemplates another tax –on 'gum'. Another frame depicted Cabinet minister D.G. Sullivan as 'the Voice', with a crooner's bouffant hairstyle and eyed adoringly by his 'bobby-soxer' fans. An understanding of the frame depended on its New Zealand readers knowing that 'the Voice' was an American nickname for Frank Sinatra, the popular crooner, and that he was especially admired by 'bobby-soxers', a metonym for American teenage girls. Other American slang pervades the cartoon, giving the impression that New Zealand language, institutions and mores have become Americanised. The traditionally unarmed New Zealand policeman 'packs a rod', waterfront workers participate in a 'skedoolie' rather than a 'go-slow'. Greetings and interlocutions are voiced in Americanese –“hi-ya”, “Say ...how's about....? Speech is described as 'snappy'. The American graffito 'Kilroy was here' becomes a punning 'Kilwatts was here,' scrawled on a hydro-electric dam. Not only Fraser and Nash copy American clothing fashions. Sullivan has a crooner's haircut, bow-tie and jacket, the teenage girls wear short skirts and bobby-ox, the father wears a boater hat, the daughter 'pumps' and a Rita Hayworth bodice, and the son's American-style ankle-cut trousers and striped T-shirt.

Scales' 'Enzed family' cartoon is also replete with specific political allusions referencing American culture. Prime Minister Fraser and his Minister of Finance, Nash, both

of whom habitually worn black suits, homburgs and stern expressions, and who publicly emphasised their rather austere Christian beliefs,¹⁹ were portrayed as the two 'senators' from

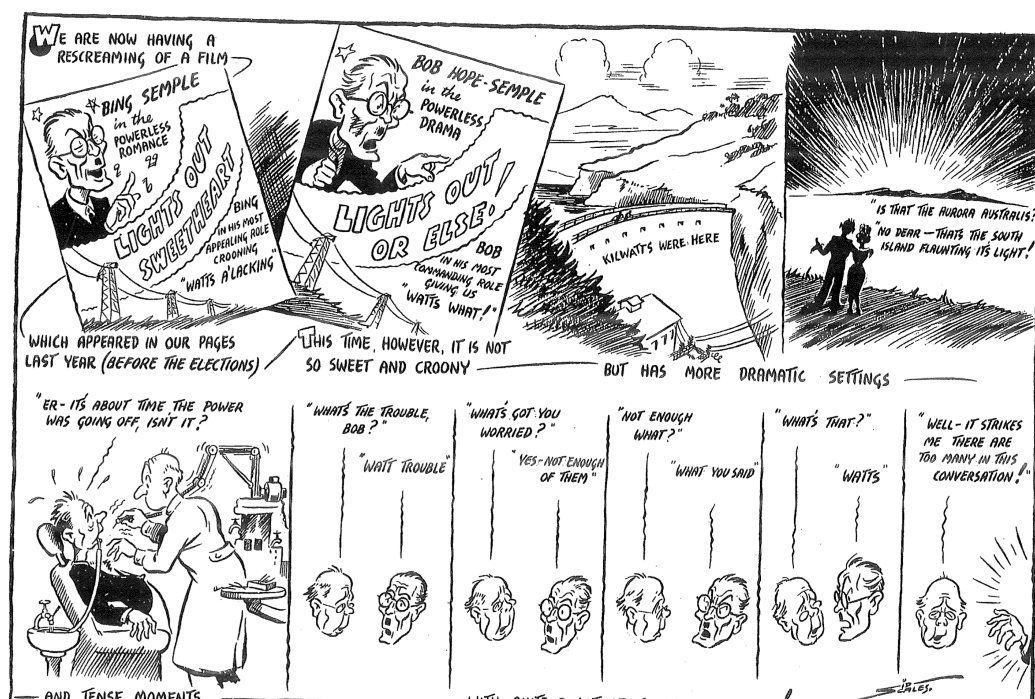
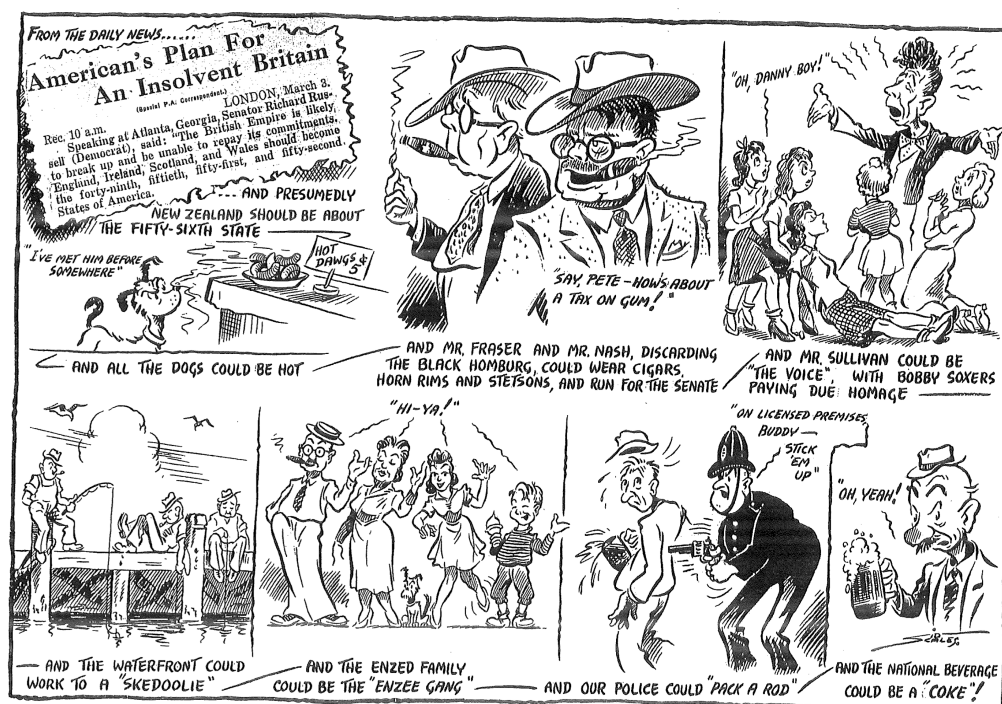


Figure 17. The Enzed Family / Robert Semple and Electricity²⁰

¹⁹ The irascible trade union leader F.P. Walsh described Nash as a 'bible-banging wowser'. Margaret Clarke, ed, *Three Labour Leaders: Nordmeyer, Kirk, Rowling* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2001), p.17

²⁰ B-074-02, *Otago Daily Times*, internal evidence suggests 1946 for both items, exact dates unknown.

New Zealand. Their clothing has been Americanised: they wear Stetson hats, horn-rim spectacles, and sports jackets. By contemporary New Zealand standards, such attire was 'loud' and ostentatious. Both men smoke cigars, which carry the connotation of politicians doing deals in 'smoke-filled rooms', at a time when the Opposition was accusing the Labour government of cronyism and corruption in its appointments and its allocation of import licences. America, the cartoon subtly suggested, was associated with vulgarity and sleaze. In short, they resemble the dubious politicians and conniving businessmen that are the villains of 1940s' Preston Sturges comedies.

Furthermore, in the 'Semple' cartoon, the artist parodied posters of American movies in order to mock one of the key Labour ministers, Bob Semple, who, as Minister of Public Works, was the target of criticism for the power cuts and lack of hydroelectric capacity that affected New Zealand during the winters of 1947-8. Scales used the figures of the popular American cinematic comedy team of Bing Crosby and Bob Hope ('Bing Semple', Bob Hope-Semple) whose 'Road' comedies were very popular in New Zealand, as a means of contrasting the perceived persona of Semple and the government. He juxtaposed the friendly, romantic persona of Crosby and the comically blustering and blundering Hope to negatively depict both Semple and his government's energy policies. The term 'powerless' describes not only of the electricity situation, but also Semple's managerial role. Visually, he is drawn as irascible and domineering, 'not so sweet and croony.' 'Lights out sweetheart' becomes "Lights out or else!" By referencing the film comedian team of Bud Abbott and Lou Costello with the rather dour personas of Fraser and Semple, especially their facial resemblances - Semple shares Abbott's angular and sardonic appearance, Fraser has Costello's rounded head and querulous expression - Scales located the comedians' American baseball routine within a very specific New Zealand political context. Here the verbal comedy is based on 'watts' as in kilowatts, not 'what', with added comic resonance coming from the fact that one of National's chief critics of the hydropower shortage was their M.P. Jack Watts.

This manipulation of American cultural referents was also manifested in the cartoon's conclusion, a montage of five panels, which featured the dialogue of Fraser and Semple, with the pair presented as an American-style comedy duo. Their dialogue makes little sense unless the cartoon's New Zealand readers were familiar with the comic routine, derived from American burlesque and radio, of Abbott and Costello. Their rapid-fire sketch featured in the pair's recent film "The Naughty Nineties," which had been shown in

America in late 1945 and in New Zealand cinemas in early 1946, a few months before Scales drew the cartoon.²¹

The 'Enzed family' cartoon is crammed with specific references to American cultural mores, and their adaptation into a New Zealand setting, demonstrating that the cartoonist and his audience were well aware of the extensive impact of American influences, and their potential to become assimilated into local social and cultural contexts. Yet this awareness, and the ironic manipulation of American cultural referents within those contexts, demonstrates that New Zealanders of that time were hardly the naïve, unresisting victims of cultural imperialism as portrayed by Hilliard, Pearson and others. The newspaper reading public understood the implications that the impact of American culture held for New Zealand's cultural identity. Thus the concluding panel of the first spread has an assertive, even angry New Zealander holding up his beer and uttering an emphatic and sarcastic negative 'OH, YEAH!' response to the suggestion '...the National beverage could be a 'Coke', that universal symbol of American life. This negative response to certain perceived features of American culture had already been prefigured in the preceding panels. Here the various American cultural signs appear as exaggerated: scheming politicians, fainting teenagers, blatantly lazy workers, the overwhelmingly cheerful family, and the angry policeman using a revolver to arrest a man drinking 'on licensed premises'. Scales' ironic response to those aspects of American culture that he highlights conveys disapproval of its hyperbole and also a warning to readers of its potential for imposing American values upon New Zealand's social and political lifestyle.

This implicit criticism of American culture as overwrought and histrionic can also be found in the work of James Sanders. His cartoon (Figure 18) about a local politician's claims about urban crime in Auckland ('a reign of terror') appropriates and transforms elements of American slang, radio serials and comic books and Hollywood gangster films to suggest that crime in New Zealand is nothing like crime in the U.S.A. Sanders' dialogue contains phrases and pronunciations lifted from gangster comics and movies, as well as radio serials – "Lissen, Mac, when you're in dis city you do as big brother says ...!" The two criminals wear the fedora hats associated with movie and comic book gangsters. One

²¹ It was also known to New Zealand listeners of short-wave radio and Radio 1ZM's brief tenure as an American armed forces station 1944-5. First broadcast in America in 1938, it relied on puns referring to the game of baseball and baseball players' nicknames: 'Who's on first [base], What's on second, I Don't Know is on third.' 'Abbott and Costello's Who's On First Routine', <[members.aol.Com/ACQtrly/who.html](http://members.aol.com/ACQtrly/who.html)>, accessed 14 July 2008 ; "International Movie Database - The Naughty Nineties", <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0037939/>>, accessed 15 July 2008

has a comic-book mask and carries a cosh; other comic-book motifs, such as fuse-bombs and daggers, litter the street or fly through the air. In the background, figures can be seen , chasing, and punching victims. Finally, in a surrealistic touch, what appear to be soldiers

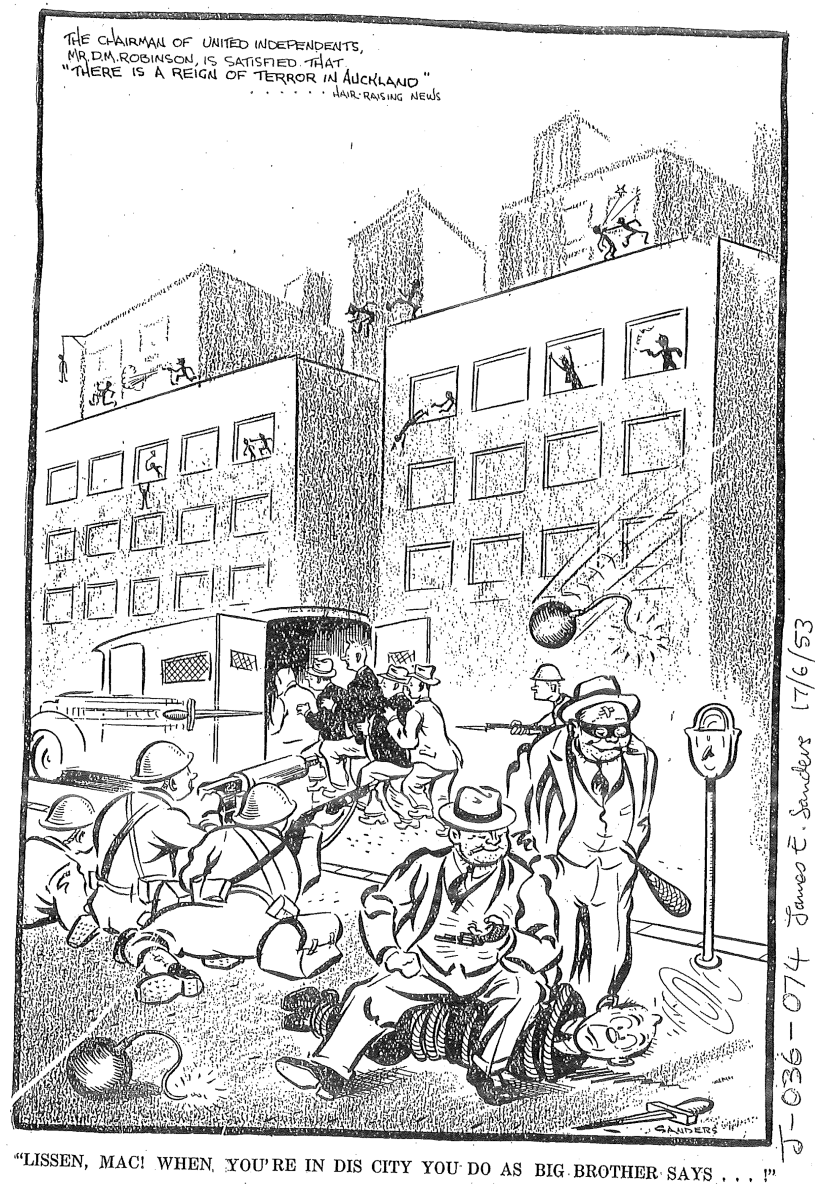


Figure 18 Crime Scene, Auckland²²

armed with a machine gun and bayonets herd people into an American-style ‘paddy-waggon’. The American cultural context is seen as violent and overwrought, and this perceived hyperbole becomes the instrument for ironic comment on a specifically New Zealand situation.

²² *New Zealand Observer*, 17 June 1953, J-036-074, Cartoon Archives

Similar disapproval of what was construed as an American tendency to overstatement and excess is also found in Sanders' 1953 cartoon, 'High Noon'. Its subject is a specific and mundane New Zealand political event: political party preparations for the general election due the next year. However, it subtly appropriates features of that uniquely

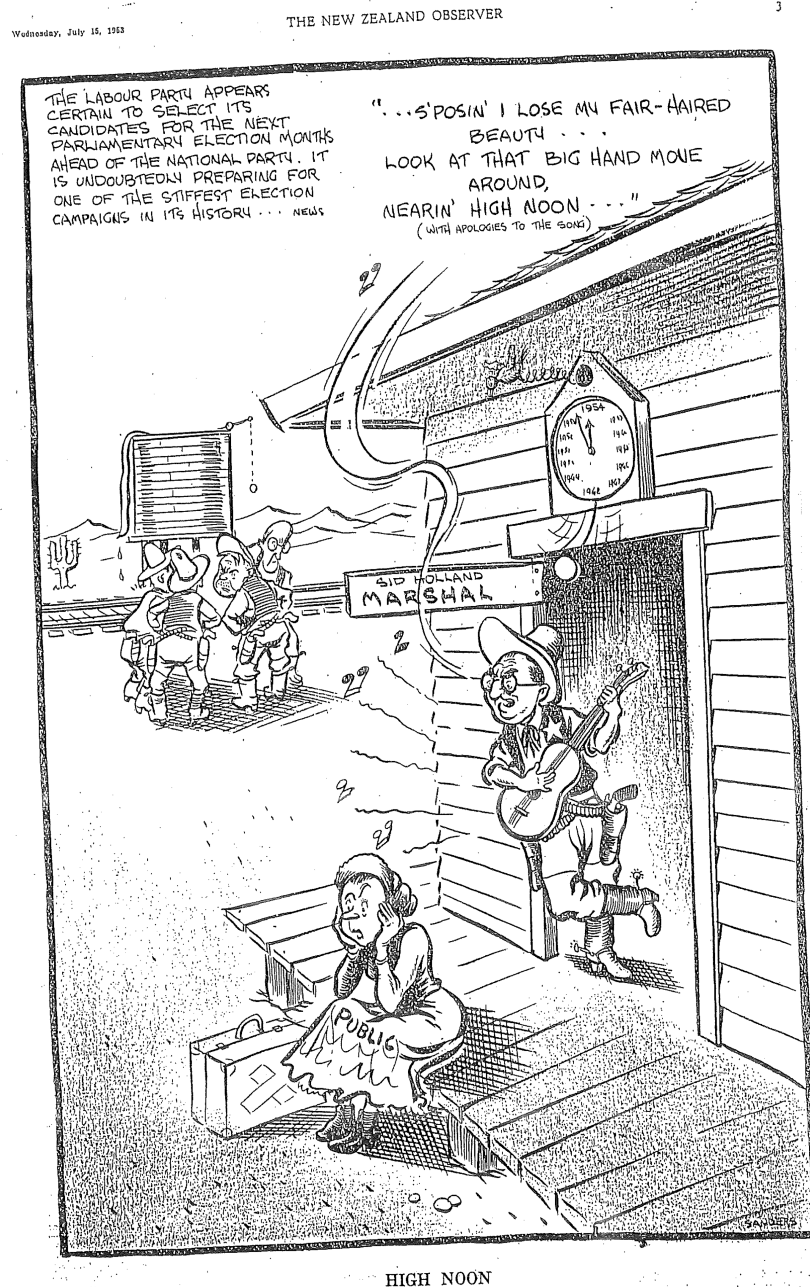


Figure 19 *High Noon* Appropriated for Political Comment ²³

American cultural genre, the Western movie, especially a recent and popular example, *High Noon*. All the figures in the cartoon correspond to characters in the movie. The guitar-

²³ *New Zealand Observer*, 15 July 1953. J-036-078, Cartoon Archives

strumming 'Marshal' is Sid Holland, the four villainous who intend to run the marshal out of town include Nash and Nordmeyer and the heroine is the New Zealand 'public', while the setting places them in a key setting of the movie, the railway station. The station itself features the recurring symbol of the movie: a clock. The cartoon even utilises words from the movie's theme song, popular in New Zealand at the time.

Therefore the key elements of *High Noon* – the impending showdown, the countdown in time, the threat to the authority figure, and the crucial role of the heroine/public – have been appropriated and relocated to a mundane New Zealand political setting. At the same time the cartoonist deftly uses these western genre elements to mock aspects of the popular culture that produced them. The movie's crucial issue – how can a pioneer community respond to the threat of violence and disorder – is transposed to another cultural context, and becomes the relatively trivial problem of selecting political candidates for an election. The upright, tense, grim marshal of the movie becomes the languid Holland leaning against a door and strumming a guitar. Two of the movie's vicious gunmen are rendered as Labour's peaceable figures, Walter Nash and Arnold Nordmeyer. And the movie's heroine, its symbol of civic and feminine rectitude becomes an exasperated New Zealand voting public. Whereas *High Noon* contained elements that were fraught and confrontational, with forebodings of violence, and themes of conflicting civil, religious and personal obligations, the New Zealand cartoon version sardonically transposes these elements to a lower key. Its comment on *High Noon* as an exemplar of American popular culture implicitly criticises that culture's perceived emphasis on confrontational violence, overwrought attitudes and melodramatic posturing over moral issues.

Another Sanders cartoon, 'Melody in Two Flats', extends his range of American cultural references to include American popular music. He used features of both film and music genres to juxtapose the attitudes of the National Government, represented by a Cabinet Minister, Hilda Ross, and the labour movement, represented by Tom Skinner, a prominent trade union leader. Ross is drawn as a character from a Hollywood musical, standing at a brightly lit window, singing "Oh, what a beautiful morning" from the Broadway show *Oklahoma!* while cheerfully scattering flowers. Skinner, on the other hand, is portrayed as a lachrymose figure, standing mournfully in front of a gloomy room with

dark curtains, while playing ‘Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen’, a doleful Negro spiritual.²⁴ Sanders’ cartoon also incorporated American film noir references. Its setting

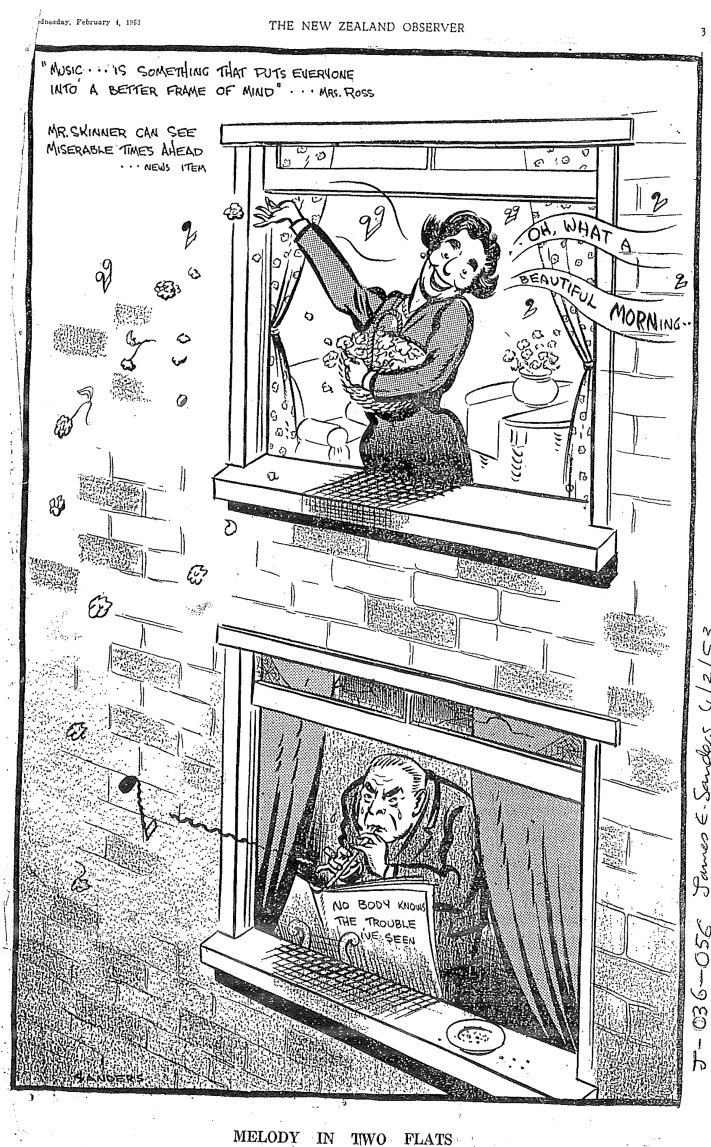


Figure 20 Two Flats: Music and Cinematic References²⁵

is a staple of Hollywood’s post-war police/detective cinema: the two protagonists framed against the windows of their brick tenement apartments. Even the brooding, saturnine appearance of Skinner closely resembles the actor Elisha Cook, Jr, who portrayed depressed and violent gangsters. The New Zealand political context of the cartoon, then, like the ‘High Noon’ cartoon, assumes that its New Zealand readers are familiar with American film and musical references. Again, the melodramatic, hyperbolic exaggerations of mood associated

²⁴ Probably introduced here in 1882. In that year the Fisk Jubilee Singers, “a company of genuine Southern ex-slaves”, paid the first of four visits. *New Zealand Listener*, 10 June 1949 p.8

²⁵ *New Zealand Observer*, 4 February 1952 J-036-056 Cartoon Archives

with Hollywood films and American life itself, are highlighted by their incongruous transposition to the New Zealand political scene.

This combination of American cinematic and musical referencing transferred to a local setting can also be seen in the work of other cartoonists. Neville Colvin's 1951 cartoon appropriated a scene from the Walt Disney animated cartoon *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (shown in New Zealand in 1938-9 and 1944-5) to comment on the recent abolition of the Legislative Council and the forthcoming general election.²⁶ Colvin juxtaposes two key scenes from the film. First, he shows the grieving dwarves surrounding the bed of the somnolent princess (the Legislative Council) and then extends this with a graphical representation of the cinematic iris (used in the film) to show Holland as the film's Prince Charming, who is infatuated not with Snow White but with the 'electors'. The cartoon's hag-like Snow White is contrasted with the beautiful young woman from the cartoon, while Holland's portly, middle-aged figure contrasts with the film's slim and handsome young prince. Furthermore, Snow White / the Legislative Council's dream

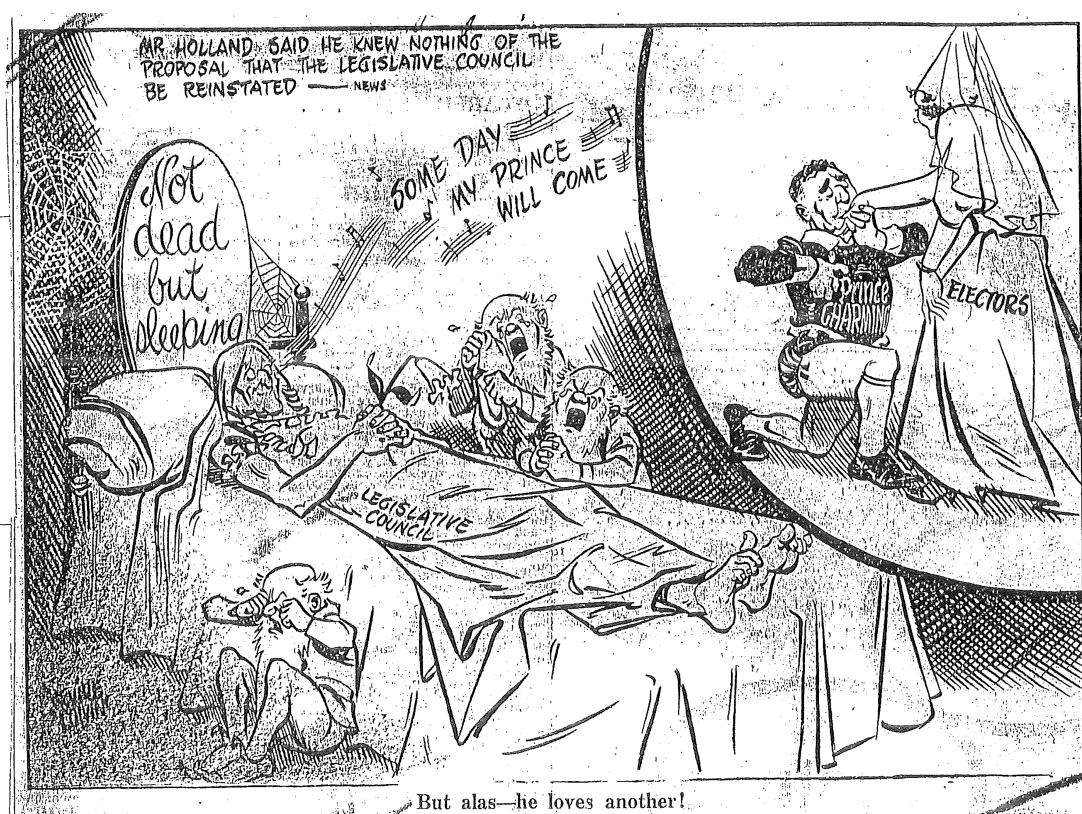


Figure 21 Disney animation appropriated for New Zealand political comment

²⁶ *Evening Post*, 24 July 1951; C132, Cartoon Archives

that “Some day my prince will come” sardonically incorporates lyrics from the film’s sentimental theme song. Colvin’s cartoon depends on his readers being aware of both the significance of the various elements adapted from the Disney film and embedded in the cartoon, as well as their comic/satiric resonances within the New Zealand context. Hollywood glamour meets mundane local political reality; romance and sentiment are replaced by expediency. Hollywood glamour is contrasted with New Zealand pragmatism. The cartoon used American cultural signs to make a mordant comment on Holland’s opportunism - and on the dubious likelihood of the second chamber being revived like Snow White.

Francis Choate’s 1951 cartoon ‘Strong, Silent Sid’, like Colvin’s cartoon, also incorporates and adapts elements from American film and song in order to comment on the persona of Holland and the forthcoming general election. The Prime Minister is portrayed in the persona of ‘Popeye the sailor man’, the chief protagonist in the eponymous American animated cartoons, which were a staple ‘short’ in the first half of New Zealand cinema programmes during the 1940s and early 1950s. Holland wears Popeye’s emblematic American sailor’s uniform, smokes his corncob pipe and is drawn with Popeye’s heavily

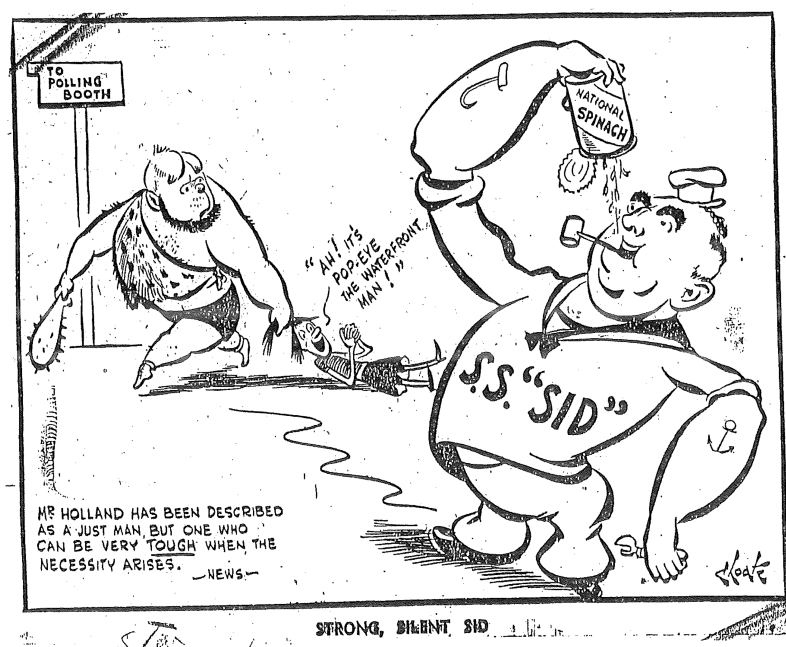


Figure 22 Holland as Popeye ²⁷

²⁷ *Auckland Star*, 23 July 1951, Choate Scrapbook, Cartoon Archives

muscled arms, emblazoned with tattoos. He is consuming a tin of Popeye's favourite food, strength-building spinach, by gulping it, Popeye-style, straight from the can. In the background a Neanderthal-like adversary, carrying a club, drags a thin female resembling the series' heroine, Olive Oyl, on his way to a signposted 'Polling Booth'. She gazes adoringly at Popeye/Holland, "the waterfront man", her would-be rescuer. Perhaps a gender element is involved. Is Choate equating Olive with New Zealand women voters, and suggesting they admire Sid's toughness?

Choate appropriates the tropes, personas and visual features of the 'Popeye' comics and cartoons in order to denigrate Nash and extol Holland. The latter is portrayed, like Popeye, as 'Strong, Silent Sid' - "very tough when the occasion arises". Nash is drawn as a typical Popeye villain: coarse, brutal and unsympathetic towards his innocent victim, those New Zealanders who were, according to National's election campaign, inconvenienced and angered by the bitter 1951 waterfront dispute. This dispute is alluded to, not only by the sailor motif, but also by Holland's tattoos (a wharfie's baling hook and an anchor) as well as by Olive's recognising cry of 'waterfront man'.

A Neville Colvin cartoon of July 1952 (Figure 23) relied on local readers' familiarity with popular American songs in order to decode its messages.²⁸ These occur within a specifically New Zealand context, a dairy farmer's milking-shed, punningly identified as a 'milk byre', which references the then current New Zealand use of the American term 'milk-bar'. The cartoon's punning caption of 'MOO-sic! MOO-sic! MOO-sic!' references the title of the teenage American singer Teresa Brewer's 'hit' song of 1950, 'Music, music, music', very popular in New Zealand at the time. Colvin's transposed lyrics 'Put another gallon in. In the nickel-plated tin. All I want is having you....' are given comic and satiric force by their juxtaposition with the original American lyrics 'Put another nickel in. In the nickelodeon. All I want is ... music, music, music'. New Zealand readers would translate these cultural codes as a wry comment on the contrasting values that the American lyrics and the New Zealand dairy-farmer place on 'Music, music, music'. At a time of high prices for dairy produce, the dairy-farmer is portrayed deriving from music, not the romantic

²⁸ *Evening Post*, 14 June 1952. E-549-q-13-056 Cartoon Archives



Figure 23 American music appropriated as satirical source

satisfaction promised by the American lyrics, but rather the financial rewards that his cows' milk production, presumably enhanced by listening to American tunes, will bring him.

One of the most sophisticated examples of New Zealand cartoonists appropriating the techniques and tropes of an American medium as a means of responding to its parent culture can be found in a double-page parody of American super-heroes comic-strips. *SCOMIX* appeared in the *New Zealand Listener* of 12 November 1954, shortly after the publication of the Mazengarb report.²⁹ It is a subtle and witty comment on American comics. Indeed, its very layout, visual design and typography - the panels, the block letters, the visual abundance of swirls and vortexes, the speech bubbles and labels - employ the key features of the medium that its opponents demanded be removed from the sight of susceptible New Zealanders.

SCOMIX's sub-title, 'Suitably Censored Organs of Merry Innocence Culturally Scrambled', is itself significant. It mockingly notes the claims that comics required censorship to protect youthful morals, but suggests that they actually constituted a harmless

²⁹ *New Zealand Listener*, 12 November 1954, pp.10-11 Cartoonist unknown.

source of amusement and pleasure. The term ‘culturally scrambled’ presciently anticipates post-modernist *bricolage* techniques with its scrambling of diverse cultural elements into a new but coherent unity. This is most noticeably achieved in its deft evocation of American comic-book super-heroes. Their American origins are signified by their distinctively early fifties *Marvel* or *Action Comics* style apparel of capes, helmets, lassoes, logos, and Spandex costumes. Comic hero names - ‘Supermen, Superwomen’ – also identify their Americanness. So does the comic strip’s use of American slang and even spelling: ‘shucks’, ‘tonite’. These super-heroes and their super-human attributes, those ‘blunt credenda of virtues and testaments to the goodness of America’³⁰ are transposed from a global and even extra-terrestrial context into mundane New Zealand settings. Thus the superheroes’ base is Oriental Bay, while Sexa Space and Detergent arrive from Mars and the UN building respectively in New York to meet above the distinctly less glamorous setting of “the largest wooden building in the cosmos” – which is located in Wellington.

These two American-style superheroes with their amazing powers become subsumed within the minutiae of everyday New Zealand suburban life. They adopt or are exposed to the idioms of 1950s New Zealand speech: ‘how’s she goin’?’, ‘giddyay’, ‘cuppa’, ‘corker joker’, ‘can’t complain’, ‘1/4 acre’. Features of the New Zealand lifestyle take over their lives: Karitane baby-care, marching girls, rotary clotheslines, mowing the back lawn, even the ubiquitous rabbits. The comic-strip heroes are relocated in a domesticated New Zealand context: the housewife hanging out washing, the now rather paunchy father repairing the kids’ bike in the garden, the New Zealand cream-painted bungalow on its quarter-acre section. Their superhero compatriots use their powers not to overthrow scheming villains and their nefarious schemes but to defeat the ‘All Blax’ and to help Sexa and Detergent build their home D.I.Y. style. The female superheroes participate in that quintessential New Zealand institution of the 1950s, a marching team. The message is clear: even American-style superheroes cannot avoid assimilation into the New Zealand lifestyle; they must, as the Vocational Guidance Officer commands, ‘reflect the N.Z. way of life. Get it?’ The heroically endowed Americans have been downsized and domesticated by exposure to the quotidian New Zealand existence.

³⁰ David Hajdu, *The Ten-Cent Plague: the Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), p.31



Figure 24 SCOMIX Super-heroes in a New Zealand Context

In such ways cartoonists provide the historian with valuable insights into the nature of New Zealand responses to American culture during the postwar decade. One of the most significant features of these cartoonists' reception of American culture was their awareness that their readership/audience was capable of recognising and interpreting the multitude of American cultural tropes that they incorporated in many of their cartoons. This knowledge was not just assumed by the cartoonists; they deftly manipulated it to make their humorous, ironic and satirical points. If nothing else, the work of Scales, Sanders and others proves that the impact of American culture on the New Zealand mind was neither evanescent nor shallow. It left a deep and permanent cultural footprint, whose impression can be measured by the extent to which these graphic artists employed references from such key American referents as politics and radio variety programmes as well as movies, music, and comics in their work.

An essential element of their craft was the remarkable extent to which it self-consciously appropriated and re-located the markers and symbols of the received culture. This appropriation was not a process of passive and complacent approval or endorsement of American cultural goods such as Broadway tunes, superheroes and film stars. Instead, these goods were unpacked and their contents subtly altered so that their original cultural messages were changed in order to comment on both the sender and the recipient nation. New Zealand cartoonists appropriated American cultural signs in order to critique what they perceived as features of that nation: its perceived generosity, wealth and modernity, and also its materialism, crassness, and violence. Ironically, the very features of cartoons that have led them to be neglected as a source of historical evidence – their humour and pungency, and iconoclastic attitudes and frequent reliance on stereotypes, along with their apparent appeal to the emotions rather than to reason - were the very features that most New Zealand critics of American media deplored in that culture.

Some of these cartoons powerfully presented New Zealand as the American antithesis. They suggested that New Zealanders, unlike Americans, are not arrogant, not insincere, not frivolous, not violent. Nor were they cloyingly sentimental or frivolous. Thus America acted as both a source of comparison and as the Other in the emerging postwar discourse about New Zealand national identity. The perceived differences between the two cultural and social identities provided New Zealanders with reference points for what Rob

Kroes calls the ‘internal struggles and debates concerning national identities and destinies.’³¹ In other words, New Zealanders used the referents of American popular culture in order to distinguish themselves from America, and in so doing partially define their own identity.

The cartoonists’ responses to Americans and their culture were frequently wryly affectionate in its tone, unlike many of the acrid reactions U.S. culture evoked from a range of New Zealand intellectuals. The attitude displayed by cartoonists like Sanders was characterised by a pervasive use of irony, a technique which is a distancing mechanism, dependent upon awareness that situations can be viewed from more than one perspective. Furthermore, they often depicted America or Americans in favourable settings or contexts signifying pleasure, modernity, consumption and excitement: displays of fashion, leisure activities and activities involving mass media.

Significantly, this selection of postwar editorial cartoons shows that their creators frequently used American rather than British cultural emblems in order to comment on aspects of contemporary New Zealand society and politics. Most of these cartoonists, unlike the Auckland cartoonist Minhinnick, confined their use of British referents within a narrow range. They used British subject matter largely to illustrate commemorative or ceremonial occasions, such as coronations and royal visits. Thus constitutional symbols, such as the Crown, and representations of members of British royalty figured prominently. There were occasional references to British politicians, especially Churchill, and to sporting occasions. But references to features of contemporary British culture, such as movies or popular music and entertainers became increasingly rare during the midcentury. With the exception of Minhinnick, cartoonists for New Zealand’s metropolitan newspapers such as Choate and Scales increasingly employed American rather than British cultural references in their comments on local political and social matters and mores.

This feature of these post-1945 cartoonists’ repertoire indicates the increasing relevance and dominance of American culture in midcentury New Zealand. So does their employment and adaptation of motifs from that culture in the confident assumption that their respective readerships would recognise and interpret these signs as parts of a binary cultural commentary embedded within a local and often ironic or satirical context. Both aspects suggest that James Belich’s argument that British ‘recolonisation’ was the crucial and characterising force during this postwar period cannot be sustained in the cultural sphere.

³¹ Kroes, Rob, “Americanization and Anti-Americanism” in *American Quarterly*, Vol.88, No.2 (June, 2006), p.503

Instead, these elements demonstrate that American was displacing British culture as the default cultural template for New Zealand. As M.H. Holcroft remarked in a *Listener* editorial in 1956, ‘our interest in what happens in England can now be little more than academic’.³² This process was a gradual transition, captured graphically by New Zealand cartoonists as they received and reacted to the various influences of American culture. One of their crucial sources of cultural appropriation, the movies, provides a fitting symbol for this momentous change in New Zealand’s cultural mentorship. The dissolve, a technique famously utilised by the great American director D.W. Griffith, is a cinematic means of illustrating the process and consequence of change. Inexorably, frame by frame, one image on the screen blends into another. The original image fades away yet its outline and significance remains for some time within the image that has replaced it. Similarly, in the 1950s New Zealand of Holcroft’s editorial, the American cultural image had become superimposed over the slowly fading picture of Britannia. Both were visible, but it was the American image that now dominated the cultural frame.

³² *New Zealand Listener*, 22 June 1956, p.4

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION: 'MORE THAN AMERICA'

For decades the culture of the United States had been treated in New Zealand newspaper editorials as the bastard offspring of British-European culture. Yet towards the end of the midcentury this source increasingly regarded American culture as legitimate cultural kin. Thus in September 1956, shortly before *Rock Around the Clock* arrived in New Zealand to a benign official reception, the *Christchurch Star-Sun* published an editorial headed 'Why Not Include America?' It observed that the 'three English-speaking nations of the Pacific region - the United States, Australia, and New Zealand' - were not only linked strategically and defensively. They were now 'trending culturally towards one another....'¹

This thesis argues that this trend did not begin with the arrival of the Marines in 1942. Much of American culture, and most of the local responses to it, had already been embedded two or three decades earlier. Those interwar decades provided the context and the ideological templates essential to understanding the responses of midcentury New Zealanders to American movies, music and comics. The physical, social and strategic presence of the American military during the Pacific war merely made manifest a continuing process of cultural transformation.

New Zealanders' cultural jurisdictions were porous and dynamic, not static and finite. The twentieth century New Zealand cultural mosaic was variegated, continually transforming as it appropriated and adapted elements of American culture. Often these constituents overlapped or coalesced with previously dominant British features. Yet the artifacts of the American cultural cascade became a fiercely contested source of cultural discourses. Some New Zealanders, chiefly members of the civic, cultural and educational elites, responded with scorn and even anger. Their critiques had one feature in common. They represented American culture as part of a symbolic system, using American cultural genres as codes that epitomised America itself. They employed a symbolic trinity to represent the U.S.A. as pernicious, hegemonic, decadent and alien.

¹ 'Why Not Include America?' *Star-Sun*, 8 September 1956, p.2 The editorial also complained that New Zealand History syllabi 'remains centred on the English Channel' while 'the centre of gravity for the country's foreign policy has moved in recent years from co-operation with Britain in the Mediterranean to co-operation with America in the Pacific.' It suggested a greater emphasis on the study of American history in New Zealand.

The godhead of this trinity was 'Hollywood' or 'movies'. Then came 'Jazz', 'Swing' and 'Rock 'n' Roll, those signifiers of American music. America was also represented by the disreputable variants of popular literature: 'comics' and 'pulp'. Yet New Zealanders who accepted and appropriated these U.S. cultural forms also employed the same synecdochal set in their responses. For them, American culture, whether it be Joan Crawford, Elvis Presley or Mickey Mouse represented enjoyment, inclusiveness and modernity. It seemed fresh, energetic and optimistic. Whereas the opponents of that culture employed similes of disease, disaster and contagion to justify their responses, its supporters used images of expanding horizons and portals opening up fresh experiences and attitudes. Marginalised groups such as women and Maori found much to admire in what they perceived as the more inclusive and egalitarian cultural values of American film and music. The forthright and assertive portrayals of women in some Hollywood movies provided women like Irene George with role models to emulate. Maori adaptation and appropriation of jazz, swing, country and western and rock 'n' roll, and the positive Pakeha acceptance of this development, was a major element in Maori emergence into the mainstream of postwar New Zealand life.

The process of emblemisation found in discourses critical of American culture was underwritten by a set of ideological tropes. The first of these was what we would now term racist. American culture was alleged to be inferior and dangerous because of its uniquely African component. Music such as jazz was a manifestation of primitivism, cannibals, the jungle and the swamp. Unlike European / British music it supposedly lacked cultural tradition and pedigree. American music, along with movies and comics, were also perceived as appealing to the senses and the emotions rather than to reason. Some amongst the civic and cultural elites claimed that this explained the appeal of these cultural forms to the allegedly less culturally intelligent, such as youths, women, Maori and those lacking formal educational qualifications. Yet the 'dark', exotic and emotive aspect of American culture held considerable appeal for many New Zealanders. They perceived it as a manifestation of newness and vitality, a marker of difference with an older European culture that some regarded as privileged and enfeebled. It also signified a more inclusive approach to cultural influences.

American music, cinema and occasionally comics and pulps were also condemned for their apprehended association with modernity, the big city and Jews. Mirams and others associated such media with New York and Los Angeles, those symbols of the modern, sophisticated, and the cosmopolitan. The last descriptor, of course, invoked the anti-

Semitism of postwar Stalinism. However, New Zealanders who responded positively to American culture had little interest in allegations of Jewish conspiracies. They regarded the cosmopolitan aspect of American entertainment as evidence of its vibrant, contemporary and exotic character, providing glimpses of settings and lifestyles far removed from those in New Zealand.

This wider public also welcomed other qualities they saw in American culture. Its variety, freshness, inclusiveness and technical innovation held great appeal. So did its perceived iconoclastic and egalitarian spirit. The very aspects that Mack Sennett admired in Keystone comedies, ‘the reduction of authority to absurdity, the notion that sex could be funny, and the bold insults held at Pretension’,² could be applied not only to American movies, but also to its songs and comics. Although they were anathema to those whose affectations of cultural piety became dogma in intellectual circles, these characteristics found widespread popular approval amongst New Zealand audiences.

Members of intellectual elites on the left condemned the key transmitters of American culture as the insidious agents of cultural, economic and military imperialism. This long-standing claim was a mélange of ideas that were intellectually fashionable from the 1920s through to the 1950s and beyond. It focused on condemning American ‘mass culture’ as a commodifying culture which reduced its publics to mere mindless consumers of aesthetic junk food. This viewpoint, anticipated by Matthew Arnold and elucidated by the Leavis school and Martin Heidegger during the interwar years, was tremendously influential amongst New Zealand intellectuals for the rest of the century. So too were its Marxist variants, such as the Frankfurt school, who saw so-called mass culture as the product of a late stage of capitalism that relegated ‘high’ culture to insignificance. Local adherents to this doctrine insisted that American culture was so aggressive and ubiquitous that it stifled the emergence of an indigenous New Zealand culture and installed an unthinking acceptance of American military and economic hegemony.

However, enjoyment and appropriation of U.S. cultural artifacts by New Zealanders did not necessarily mean an unthinking endorsement of an American capitalist or militarist ethos. As demonstrated by the various testimonies of editorial cartoonists, film fans, musicians and authors and letter-writing members of the public, New Zealanders did not behave like an undifferentiated and indiscriminating mass overwhelmed by an

² Although not to Fairburn, James K. Baxter, and J.C. Reid, for example. Sennett is cited in Michael Kammen, *American Culture American Tastes: Social Change and the Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1999), p.156

irresistible cultural force. Instead they formed a multiplicity of interpretive communities. They selected, appropriated, and adapted those elements of that culture that they found relevant, useful or enjoyable in their social and cultural lives. At the same time they ignored or rejected other features. Some employed American cultural motifs and themes to mock or condemn aspects of American culture and society. A love of rock 'n' roll and the 'southern sound' did not mean acceptance of racist values. Enjoyment of movies featuring American sailors singing and dancing in various colourful locations did not equate to an endorsement of U.S. military expansion. Many New Zealanders understood that their cultural cache was being refreshed and extended. This did not prevent them from condemning American materialism, or deploring what they regarded as a selfish and demeaning economic system. Nor did it impede them from scorning what some regarded as the particularly American vices of sanctimony, arrogance and greed. But unlike Hilliard, Mason and Locke for example, the public's cultural peripheral vision was not blinkered by ideologies and attitudes that required American culture to be construed as inherently inferior and salacious, a threat to a gullible, susceptible and semi-literate public.

New Zealanders have always thought of themselves, culturally, in relation to some larger other. Until the early twentieth century, that entity was Britain. From the 1920s the United States increasingly replaced the United Kingdom in that cultural role. This was a historic shift of cultural power. It aroused fears amongst an influential minority. Those who enjoyed or admired American cultural forms were less troubled. As this thesis has shown, many in mid-century New Zealand used American culture as a means of triangulation in re-defining themselves and their nation in relation to Britain. Its growing popularity and ubiquity marked a significant shift on the cultural continuum away from the notion that New Zealand's cultural growth depended on British nurturing. Opponents of American cultural influences represented Hollywood, swing and comics as a threat to our British cultural heritage. Such New Zealanders believed that cultural consumption determined national identity. They implied that enjoyment of American movies, music and comics was in effect a declaration of cultural disloyalty, a rejection of the 'Mother Country'. But for an increasing number of New Zealanders, approval and appropriation of American cultural forms was not repudiation of Britain. It was a nuanced form of distancing. New Zealanders' attitudes to American culture reflected their attempts to redefine and realign their understandings of the nation's relationship with 'Mother England'.

New Zealand responses to the key agents of American culture in the mid-century

demonstrate that, contrary to the assertions of Belich, the nation no longer relied on one cultural metropolis, London. On the contrary, this thesis argues that New Zealanders' reception of American culture reveals that London's cultural hegemony had been overthrown early in the twentieth century. It contends that by the 1940s New Zealand had not one but four cultural metropolises. New York and Los Angeles had joined London and Sydney as the cardinal sources of cultural influence and debate. Midcentury New Zealand was not undergoing a process of cultural recolonisation. Instead, it was in a crucial stage of cultural *decolonisation* from Britain. A vital feature of this decoupling process was the dismayed recognition by many cultural and civic guardians that the New Zealand public increasingly preferred American to British cultural modes. Accordingly, these elites demanded policies of restriction, interdiction and censorship in an ultimately futile attempt to mould that public's cultural tastes. Some, like Fraser, Scott and Shelley believed that the public's tastes could be uplifted, or 'conditioned', in Shelley's revealing phrase, in order to qualify them for cultural enfranchisement. Others, like Fairburn and Pocock, believed the mass of New Zealanders were beyond cultural redemption.

Some within the cultural elites recoiled from American cultural modes not only because they associated them with vulgarity and frivolity, and perceived them as tainted by their links with Jews and African-Americans. They also recoiled from the capitalist ethos of much American music, cinema and popular literature. Another factor in elitist New Zealand's disapproval of U.S. culture was that it exemplified the overthrow of the traditional separation of 'high' and 'popular' culture, and the triumph of modernism. Just as Jefferson had suggested that each new American generation should renew the American polity, Ezra Pound's mantra 'MAKE IT NEW' constituted what George McKay called the 'seductive grand narrative of the American cultural project'.³ In reacting to America and its cultural forms, New Zealanders, especially the intellectual elites, were also reacting to the implications of the modernist movement of the early decades of the twentieth century. The very features that characterised twentieth century American movies, comics and music also emblematised modernism. These art forms rejected the notion of culture as the instrument of moral, civic and intellectual edification and scorned a self-conscious focus on 'serious'

³ George McKay, ed, *Yankee Go Home (& Take Me With You): Americanization and Popular Culture* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), p.17

matters such as religion or ideology.⁴ Their disdain for tradition, their irreverence, and incorporation of visual, aural and linguistic borrowings from the ‘street’ are all to be found in the work of seminal twentieth century artists such as Picasso, Braque, Joyce and Stravinsky.⁵

These shared characteristics of American culture and modernism were anathema to certain of New Zealand’s cultural cognoscenti in the interwar years and the midcentury. Swing, Superman and westerns fell outside their prescribed aesthetic and cultural boundaries. Throughout the twentieth century, shameless Yankee cultural seducers had been infiltrating formerly respectable galleries of European culture. The saloon appeared to be replacing the salon. For such critics, American cultural forms were culturally promiscuous, co-habiting with different cultural genres regardless of their national, racial or class origin. This thesis has demonstrated that such cultural miscegenation shocked some members of New Zealand’s elites. It infuriated people as disparate in their social and political outlook as Shelley and Fairburn. Although some of them belonged to the left, they were in fact cultural reactionaries. They favoured aesthetic sensibilities best exemplified by eighteenth century high bourgeois culture, approved by Arnold and endorsed by Leavis and Adorno. In seeking to maintain the aesthetic hierarchies and divisions expected of ‘high’ culture, these New Zealand mandarins were buttressing the very bourgeois social values they deplored.⁶

In mid-twentieth century New Zealand, as in eighteenth and nineteenth century France, elites engaged in an exclusionary process whereby ‘popular’ American cultural forms were demoted to the conditions of inferiority, alterity and contagion, and constantly maligned as endangering those nations’ moral, cultural and social welfare. What these educationally privileged New Zealanders failed to realise was that New Zealand’s cultural relationship with the world was no longer a binary one, filtered through a British ‘high’ culture sensibility. Cultural input was now received from a multiplicity of sources, many channelled from the United States. The responses to these new cultural conduits reveal that they were proof, not of New Zealand exceptionalism, but of the nation’s integration within

⁴ This reaction on the part of elites was, of course, not confined to New Zealand. See Richard Pells’ discussion in his ‘Is American Culture “American”? *Ejournal USA*, February 2006, <<http://www.america.gov/st/business-english/2006/February/2008>>, accessed 24 October 2010

⁵ For a fascinating cinematic approach to this topic, see Arne Glimcher’s documentary film, *Picasso and Braque Go the Movies*, (Director: Arne Glimcher, Producers: Martin Scorsese and Robert Greehut, Arthouse Films and Curiously Bright Entertainment, 2008).

⁶ See Stanley Aronowitz’s discussion of this feature in his *Roll Over Beethoven: the Return of Cultural Strife* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), esp. pp. 63-66

global networks. They provide evidence of what Peter Gibbons calls ‘the world’s place in New Zealand’.⁷ As Daniel Rodgers observes ‘[e]ven the most isolated of nation-states is a semi-permeable container, washed over by forces originating far beyond its shores’.⁸ These forces traversed time as well as oceans. The fears of elites that new cultural modes and attitudes corroded their cultural and social authority reach back to Socrates and Plato. So do their claims that their attempts at cultural proscription were aimed at preventing the corruption of youth.

Considerations of cultural taste played an essential part in the responses of many of New Zealand’s various elites towards American movies, music and comics. Their allegations about the undesirable social and cultural effects of American media not only lacked probative force. Their fulminations against Hollywood, comics and swing were discharges from a deeper wound. They concealed elitist concerns about the impact of affluence, leisure, consumerism and the erosion of aesthetic hierarchies.⁹ These New Zealanders were determined to incorporate and consolidate legitimated definitions of cultural and aesthetic values within the nation’s cultural foundations. As Dick Hebdige has noted, such definitions had a hidden agenda, camouflaging anxieties about cultural heritage and national identity.¹⁰ They distracted attention from the ideological, political and status motivations underlying hostile critiques of America and its culture. Their responses also illustrated a wider and more disturbing historical phenomenon. This feature was what Tony Judt called ‘the appeal of authority and authoritarianism to the intelligentsia’.¹¹ Mirams, Locke and others believed in a form of cultural democratic centralism. Like Walter Lippmann they insisted that a democracy required leadership by a ‘natural aristocracy’ of the wise and the virtuous.

Roger Horrocks maintains that New Zealand intellectuals constantly fought what he regards as the stifling Puritanism of New Zealand life: ‘the battle against censorship was a primary concern of New Zealand artists and intellectuals until at least the 1980s’.¹² Yet this

⁷ Peter Gibbons, ‘The Far Side of the Search for Identity: Reconsidering New Zealand History’, *New Zealand Journal of History*, vol.37, no.1 (2003), pp.38-47

⁸ Daniel Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Policies in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1998), p.3

⁹ Dick Hebdige, ‘Towards a Cartography of Taste’ in *Hiding in the Light: On Images and Things* (London & New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 8-10

¹⁰ Hebdige, ‘Cartography’, p.9

¹¹ Tony Judt, ‘Captive Minds’, *New York Review of Books*, LVII, 14 (Sept.30-Oct.13 2010), p.8

¹² Horrocks claims that Puritanism dominated New Zealand life until the 1960s. ‘A Short History of the New Zealand Intellectual’ in Laurence Simmons, ed, *Speaking Truth to Power: Public Intellectuals Rethink New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2007), p.36

thesis has shown that during the midcentury a surprisingly large proportion of them displayed their own puritanical and authoritarian tendencies in their campaigns against American culture. From Fairburn on the right, to Pearson, Hilliard and Locke on the left, they consistently demanded censorship or outright proscription of cultural content that they deemed morally, socially or politically offensive. For all his earlier condemnation of film censorship, Mirams, once he became censor, cut films that he had already restricted to adult audiences and banned those that offended his social values. Scott condemned Hollywood movies without actually seeing them. Shelley physically destroyed popular records that offended his cultural standards. Hilliard and Pearson displayed a religious zealotry in their attempts to 'protect' themselves and the public from political and cultural contamination by American cultural demons. They even refused to read contemporary American literature at a time when American authors were producing some of the twentieth century's finest works.

Such intellectuals were the cultural missionaries of the New Zealand midcentury. They attempted to bring the revelatory faith of the one true set of cultural and ideological values to what they portrayed as an unenlightened and somnolent populace, 'fretful sleepers' who existed in a state of torpor according to Pearson's famous essay. This stereotyping was a revealing but crippling form of transference. Some of this intelligentsia, living in a circumscribed intellectual milieu, and suffering from cultural cabin fever, projected onto the New Zealand public their own fretful intolerance, self-righteousness and group conformity. Blinkered by credos that required them to believe the worst about American culture, they failed to adjust their perspective to the range of receptions that culture met within New Zealand. Thus they remained oblivious to the significance of this major episode in the nation's cultural and social history. Narrowly focused on the dangers of American culture, emphasising its superficiality and vulgarity, this influential group ignored that culture's invigorating and liberating potentialities.

An equally significant characteristic of such cultural arbiters was their patronising and supercilious attitude to the New Zealand public. This is evinced not only in the contempt they often displayed towards New Zealanders as audiences for American culture. It is also revealed in their frequently condescending rejection of the cultural and social lives of their fellow New Zealanders. They paid lip service to Pearson's argument that the artist in New Zealand should attempt 'living not only among but as one of the people and

feeling your way into their problems'.¹³ Yet most, including Pearson, displayed little interest in investigating how and why the mass of New Zealanders actually responded to American culture. Instead they relied on a set of ideological constructions that claimed to portray how that public *should* react.

Those of New Zealand's elites who so adamantly condemned American culture faced a problem. How, in a society that loudly proclaimed its democratic and egalitarian ethos, and which greeted American movies, music and comics with enthusiasm, could they justify their condemnation of these popular art forms? I have shown that their solution was twofold. First, some alleged that Hollywood, comics, and jazz were salacious and meretricious, transmitting the cultural viruses of a corrupt and unjust society, endangering the nation's moral and social well-being, especially that of its vulnerable youth. They also used another rhetorical strategy to affirm the initiatives of social and control management that they urged. This involved the construction of a civic and cultural fiction: a susceptible and immature populace endangered by a toxic foreign culture, and requiring the paternalistic and austere protection and supervision of cultural guardians. Accordingly, the New Zealand audiences for American cultural artifacts were provided with the characteristics consistent with those demanded by the theories of Leavis, Heidegger, Adorno and Marcuse. They were represented as gullible, homogenised, passive and narcotized, yet at the same time depicted as emotional and volatile. Thus New Zealanders who listened to Fats Domino, watched westerns or read comics were denigrated as 'morons', described as 'the great unwashed' and classified as 'maggots'.

This thesis has demonstrated that throughout the first six decades of the twentieth century, New Zealanders critical of American culture constantly disparaged the local audiences of that culture. These critics were aware that their political, aesthetic and ideological objections could be construed as partisan. They also recognised that their particular cultural tastes could be parsed as selfish and patronising. Both apprehensions were conveniently enfolded within the argument that the chief signifiers of America and its media - movies, music and comics - threatened the cultural and moral welfare of an impressionable and immature New Zealand public. This was demonstrated by the policies of the Labour government's Motion Picture committee, Shelley's broadcasting philosophy, Scott's edicts on cultural taste and Miram's attempts to extend his censorship powers.

¹³ Bill Pearson, 'Fretful Sleepers: A Sketch of New Zealand Behaviour and Its Implications for the Artist' in Bill Pearson, *Fretful Sleepers and Other Essays* (Auckland: Heinemann Educational Books, 1974), p.33

Such was the disconnection of most critics of American culture from the midcentury New Zealand public that they failed to understand that Hollywood movies and the various forms of American music provided a crucial sense of community and participation. Audiences watching Bugs Bunny in draughty small town picture theatres and family and friends dancing to swing or hit parade tunes at weddings and twenty-firsts, mates swapping comics, all constituted an essential feature of New Zealand life for at least half a century. Yet this was an aspect overlooked by most cultural entrepreneurs. They remained oblivious to the wider implications of the public's responses to American culture, although they were sufficiently awake to recognise that these challenged their roles as cultural guardians and political vanguards. It was left to a minority, like Reid and M.K. Joseph, to admire the potentialities and insights offered by American cultural genres. Other postwar artists like R.H. Morrieson soon drew upon these resources, delighting in, and transplanting into a New Zealand setting, these genres' fascination with style and irony as well as their inclusion of the attitudes and aesthetics of minorities and the marginalised.

The repercussions of the impact of American culture within midcentury New Zealand demonstrate the inaccuracy and inappropriateness of the persistent myth of the immediate postwar decade. That era was hardly one of social, political and cultural conformity and stultifying anomie. Instead, this thesis maintains that those years marked the location of debate over a crucial issue: the nature and impact of American global culture and its political ramifications. Far from being marked by a numbing homogeneity and conservatism, midcentury New Zealand was expanding its cultural repertoire. The issue of culture, especially the American version, and its perceived moral and social consequences, even became a source of political contention, exemplified by the 1954 comics-delinquency controversy.

Much of the negative reaction to American cultural forms at this time was conflated with Cold War issues. The template of an expansionist and hegemonic American militaristic state aligned neatly with claims that an equally avaricious and domineering culture threatened national cultural autonomies. So did assertions that the explosion of American culture abroad triggered a toxic social and cultural fallout. The culture's alleged salaciousness, commercialism and anti-social elements spread immorality, selfishness, and greed, especially among the susceptible: the young and those with minimal education. This rhetoric can also be found in denunciations of Hollywood music and comics. It was especially popular on the left because it distracted attention from the ideological and political motivations of its adherents. The allegations of American cultural contamination

also attempted to shift the focus away from what the centre-right claimed was communist and union sabotage of the economy and towards an emphasis on maintaining family values and protecting children from pernicious American media. The iconoclastic, subversive elements of American culture also scared the cultural conservatives of both left and right. Its capitalist ethos infuriated the left while its disrespect for tradition angered the right. Its egalitarian spirit and demotic sources held troubling implications for those on both political wings who questioned the cultural and intellectual capacity of the New Zealand public. Hence their constant advocacy of the need for monitors of public taste to establish and enforce appropriate standards.

These negative constructions of American cultural influences during the mid-century had long-term consequences. They help explain why America and its cultural disseminators were the source of both approval and condemnation for decades after World War II. The very popularity of American comics, films and music made them suspect to many within the educational and cultural elites. Hollywood, along with rock 'n' roll and its musical successors were tainted by their association with working-class lifestyles and values and also by their links with Jewish entrepreneurs. Their connection with African-Americans and their big city /ghetto locations caused equal distress. Cultural guardian groups continue into the twenty-first century their long campaigns against those features of American culture which offend their high bourgeois standards of taste and their political and aesthetic ideologies.

In the best and most famous study of American democracy and its implications, Tocqueville remarked that in investigating America, he had discovered 'more than America'. Tocqueville realised that American society and culture provided insights and understandings into contemporary France and western Europe. Similarly, a study of how and why New Zealanders responded to American culture in the mid-twentieth century is revelatory of the nation's cultural, social and political state during that era. New Zealand at that time was not the torpid site of complacency and conformity so frequently portrayed in both academic and popular histories. Nor was it populated by a culturally and intellectually lazy public oblivious to the stings of educated elites striving earnestly to rouse them from their slumber. New Zealanders were far from being the passive and indiscriminating subjects of a culture imposed on them for America's hegemonic purposes. Instead, they selected, appropriated, adapted, adopted and rejected elements of that culture. Almost three-quarters of a century later, their diversified and measured reception of American movies, music and popular literature deserves vindication.

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